A GLANCE AT PAGE 604 MAY MEAN £5 TO YOU.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 410. FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 7TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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No. 45
Nov. 7, 1896.
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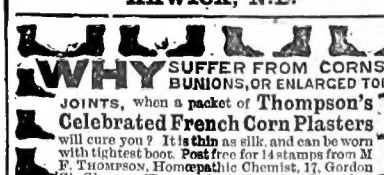

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 410.] For the Week ending November 7th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

THE STORY OF THE THREE BEAUTIFUL PRINCESSES.

IN olden times there reigned a Moorish King in Granada, whose name was Mohamed, to which his subjects added the appellation of El Haygari, or the "Left-handed." Some say he was so called on account of his being really more expert with his sinister than his dexter hand; others, because he was prone to take everything by the wrong end, or, in other words, to mar wherever he meddled.

Certain it is, either through misfortune or mismanagement, he was continually in trouble; thrice was he driven from his throne, and, on one occasion, barely escaped to Africa with his life, in the disguise of a fisherman. Still, he was as brave as he was blundering; and, though left-handed, wielded his scymitar to such purpose that he each time re-established himself upon his throne by dint of hard fighting.

Instead, however, of learning wisdom from adversity, he hardened his neck, and stiffened his left arm in wilfulness. The evils of a public nature, which he thus brought upon himself and his kingdom, may be learned by those who will delve into the Arabian annals of Granada; the present legend deals but with his domestic policy.

As this Mohamed was one day riding forth with a train of his courtiers, by the foot of the mountain of Elvira, he met a band of horsemen returning from a foray into the land of the Christians. They were conducting a string of mules laden with spoil, and many captives of both sexes, among whom the monarch was struck with the appearance of a beautiful damsel, richly attired, who sat weeping on a low palfrey, and heeded not the consoling words of a duenna who rode beside her.

The monarch was struck with her beauty, and, on inquiring of the Captain of the troop, found that she was the daughter of the Alcayde of a frontier fortress, that had been surprised and sacked in the course of the foray. Mohamed claimed her as his royal share of the booty, and had her conveyed to his harem in the Alhambra. There everything was devised to soothe her melancholy; and the monarch, more and more enamoured, sought to make her his queen. The Spanish maid at first repulsed his addresses—he was an infidel—he was the open foe of her country—what was worse, he was stricken in years!

Everything was devised to soothe her melancholy.

The monarch, finding his assiduities of no avail, determined to enlist in his favour the duenna who had been captured with the lady. She was an Andalusian by birth, whose Christian name is forgotten, being mentioned in Moorish legends by no other appellation than that of the discreet Kadiga—and discreet in truth she was, as her whole history makes evident. No sooner had the Moorish King held a little private conversation with her, than she saw at once the cogency of his reasoning, and undertook his cause with her young mistress.

"Go to, now!" cried she, "what is there in all this to weep and wail about? Is it not better to be mistress of this beautiful palace, with all its gardens and fountains, than to be shut up within your father's old frontier tower? As to this Mohamed being an infidel, what is that to the purpose? You marry him, not his religion; and, if he is waxing a little old, the sooner will you be a widow, and mistress of yourself; at any rate, you are in his power, and must either be a queen or a slave. When in the hands of a robber, it is better to sell one's merchandise for a fair price than to have it taken by main force."

The arguments of the discreet Kadiga prevailed. The Spanish lady dried her tears, and became the spouse of

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Mohamed the Left-handed; she even conformed, in appearance, to the faith of her royal husband; and her discreet duenna immediately became a zealous convert to the Moslem doctrines; it was then the latter received the Arabian name of Kadiga, and was permitted to remain in the confidential employ of her mistress.

In due process of time the Moorish King was made the proud and happy father of three lovely daughters—all born at a birth; he could have wished they had been sons, but consoled himself with the idea that three

All three peeped cautiously through the lattice.

daughters at a birth were pretty well for a man somewhat stricken in years, and left-handed!

As usual with all Moslem monarchs, he summoned his astrologers on this happy event. They cast the nativities of the three Princesses, and shook their heads. "Daughters, O King!" said they, "are always precarious property; but these will most need your watchfulness when they arrive at a marriageable age; at that time gather them under your wings, and trust them to no other guardianship."

Mohamed the Left-handed was acknowleaged to be a wise king by his courtiers, and was certainly so considered by himself. The prediction of the astrologers caused him but little disquiet, trusting to his ingenuity to guard his daughters and outwit the Fates.

The three-fold birth was the last matrimonial trophy of the monarch; his queen bore him no more children, and died within a few years, bequeathing her infant daughters to his love, and to the fidelity of the discreet Kadiga.

Many years had yet to elapse before the Princesses would arrive at that period of danger—the marriageable age. "It is good, however, to be cautious in time," said the shrewd monarch; so he determined to have them reared in the royal castle of Salobreña. This was a sumptuous palace, incrusted, as it were, in a powerful Moorish fortress on the summit of a hill that overlooks the Mediterranean Sea.

In this delicious abode, in a propitious climate, and under a cloudless sky, the three Princesses grew up into wondrous beauty; but, though all reared alike, they gave early tokens of diversity of character. Their names were Zayda, Zorayda, and Zorahayda; and such was their order of seniority, for there had been precisely three minutes between their births.

Zayda, the eldest, was of an intrepid spirit, and took the lead of her sisters in everything, as she had done in entering first into the world. She was curious and inquisitive, and fond of getting at the bottom of things.

Zorayda had a great feeling for beauty, which was the reason, no doubt, of her delighting to regard her own image in a mirror or a fountain, and of her fondness for flowers and jewels, and other tasteful ornaments.

As for Zorahayda, the youngest, she was soft and timid, and extremely sensitive, with a vast deal of disposable tenderness, as was evident from her number of pet flowers and pet birds and pet animals, all of which she cherished with the fondest care. Her amusements, too, were of a gentle nature, and mixed up with musing and reverie.

Years rolled on smoothly and serenely; the discreet Kadiga, to whom the Princesses were confided, was faithful to her trust.

The castle of Salobreña, as has been said, was built upon a hill on the sea coast. One of the exterior walls straggled down the profile of the hill, until it reached a jutting rock over-hanging the sea, with a narrow, sandy beach at its foot, laved by the rippling billows. A small watch-tower on this rock had been fitted up as a pavilion, with latticed windows to admit the sea-breeze. Here the Princesses used to pass the sultry hours of midday.

The curious Zayda was one day seated at one of the windows of the pavilion, as her sisters, reclining on ottomans, were taking the siesta, or noon-tide slumber, her attention had been attracted to a galley which came coasting along, with measured strokes of the oar. As it drew near, she observed that it was filled with armed men. The galley anchored at the foot of the tower; a number of Moorish soldiers landed on the narrow beach, conducting several Christian prisoners.

The curious Zayda awakened her sisters, and all three peeped cautiously through the close jalousies of the lattice, which screened them from sight. Among the prisoners were three Spanish cavaliers, richly dressed. They were in the flower of youth, and of noble presence; and the lofty manner in which they carried themselves, though loaded with chains and surrounded with enemies, bespoke the grandeur of their souls.

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The Princesses gazed with intense and breathless interest. Cooped up as they had been in this castle among female attendants, seeing nothing of the male sex but black slaves or the rude fishermen of the sea-coast, it is not to be wondered at that the appearance of three gallant cavaliers, in the pride of youth and manly beauty, should produce some commotion in their bosoms.

"Did ever nobler being tread the earth than that cavalier in crimson?" cried Zayda, the eldest of the sisters. "See how proudly he bears himself, as though all around him were his slaves!"

"But notice that one in green!" exclaimed Zorayda "What grace! what elegance! what spirit!"

The gentle Zorahayda said nothing, but she secretly gave preference to the cavalier in purple.

The Princesses remained gazing until the prisoners were out of sight; then, heaving long-drawn sighs, they turned round, looked at each other for a moment, and sat down, musing and pensive, on their ottomans.

The discreet Kadiga found them in this situation; they related to her what they had seen, and even the withered heart of the duenna was warmed. "Poor youths!" exclaimed she, "I'll warrant their captivity makes many a fair and high-born lady's heart ache in their native land! Ah! my children, you have little idea of the life these cavaliers lead in their own country. Such prankling at tournaments! Such devotion to the ladies! Such courting and serenading!"

The curiosity of Zayda was fully roused; she was insatiable in her inquiries, and drew from the duenna the most animated pictures of the scenes of her youthful days and native land. The beautiful Zorayda bridled up, and slyly regarded herself in a mirror, when the theme turned upon the charms of the Spanish ladies, while Zorahayda suppressed a struggling sigh at the mention of moonlight serenades.

Every day the curious Zayda renewed her inquiries, and every day the sage duenna repeated her stories, which were listened to with profound interest, though with frequent sighs, by her gentle auditors. The discreet old woman at length awakened to the mischief she might be doing. She had been accustomed to think of the Princesses only as children; but they had imperceptibly ripened beneath her eye, and now bloomed before her three lovely damsels of the marriageable age. It is time, thought the duenna, to give notice to the King.

Mohamed the Left-handed was seated one morning on a divan in one of the cool halls of the Alhambra, when a slave arrived from the fortress of Salobreña with a message from the sage Kadiga, congratulating him on the anniversary of his daughters' birthday. The slave at the same time presented a delicate little basket decorated with flowers, within which, on a couch of vine and fig-leaves, lay a peach, an apricot, and a nectarine, with their bloom and down and dewy sweetness upon them and all in the early stage of tempting ripeness. The monarch was versed in the Oriental language of fruits and flowers, and readily divined the meaning of this emblematical offering.

"So," said he, "the critical period pointed out by the astrologers is arrived; my daughters are at a marriageable age. What is to be done? They are shut up from the eyes of men; they are under the eyes of the discreet Kadiga—all very good!—but still they are not under my own eye, as was prescribed by the astrologers. I must gather them under my wing, and trust no one else."

The slave . . . presented a delicate little basket.

So saying, he ordered that a tower of the Alhambra should be prepared for their reception, and departed at the head of his guards for the fortress of Salobreña, to conduct them home in person.

About three years had elapsed since Mohamed had beheld his daughters, and he could scarcely credit his eyes at the wonderful change which that small space of time had made in their appearance. During the interval they had passed that wondrous boundary line in female life which separates the crude, uninformed, and thoughtless girl from the blooming, blushing, meditative woman.

Zayda was tall and finely-formed, with a lofty demeanour and a penetrating eye. She entered with a stately and decided step, and made a profound reverence to Mohamed, treating him more as her sovereign than her father.

Zorayda was of the middle height, with an alluring look and swimming gait, and a sparkling beauty, heightened by the assistance of the toilette. She approached her father with a smile, kissed his hand, and saluted him with several stanzas from a popular Arabian poet, with which the monarch was delighted. Zorahayda was shy and timid, smaller than her sisters, and with a beauty of that tender, beseeching kind which looks for fondness and protection. She was little fitted to command, like her elder sister, or to dazzle like the second, but was rather formed to creep to the bosom of manly affection, to nestle within it, and be content. She drew near her father with a timid, and almost faltering step, and would have taken his hand to kiss, but on looking up into his face, and seeing it beaming with paternal smiles, the tenderness of her nature broke forth, and she threw herself upon his neck.

He prepared for his return to Granada by sending heralds before him, commanding everyone to keep out.

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of the road by which he was to pass, and that all doors and windows should be closed at the approach of the Princesses. This done, he set forth, escorted by a troop of black horsemen, of hideous aspect, and clad in shining armour.

The Princesses rode beside the King, closely veiled, on beautiful white palfreys, with velvet caparisons, embroidered with gold, and sweeping the ground; the bits and stirrups were of gold, and the silken bridles adorned with pearls and precious stones. The palfreys were covered with little silver bells, that made the most musical tinkling as they ambled gently along. Woe to the unlucky wight, however, who lingered in the way when he heard the tinkling of these bells!—the guards were ordered to cut him down without mercy.

The cavalcade was drawing near to Granada, when it overtook, on the banks of the river Xenil, a small body of Moorish soldiers with a convoy of prisoners. It was too late for the soldiers to get out of the way, so they threw themselves on their faces on the earth, ordering their captives to do the like. Among the prisoners were the three identical cavaliers whom the Princesses had seen from the pavilion. They either did not understand or were too haughty to obey the order, and remained standing and gazing upon the cavalcade.

The ire of the monarch was kindled at this flagrant defiance of his orders. Drawing his scymitar, and pressing forward, he was about to deal a left-handed blow, that would have been fatal to, at least, one of the gazers, when the Princesses crowded round him, and implored mercy for the prisoners; even the timid Zorahayda forgot her shyness, and became eloquent in their behalf. Mohamed paused, with uplifted scymitar, when the Captain of the guard threw himself at his feet. "Let not your Majesty," said he, "do a deed that may cause great scandal throughout the kingdom. These are three brave and noble Spanish knights, who have been taken in battle, fighting like lions; they are of high birth, and may bring great ransoms."

"Enough!" said the King. "I will spare their lives, but punish their audacity—let them be taken to the Vermilion Towers, and put to hard labour."

Mohamed was making one of his usual left-handed blunders. In the tumult and agitation of this blustering scene, the veils of the three Princesses had been thrown back, and the radiance of their beauty revealed; and in prolonging the parley, the King had given that beauty time to have its full effect. In those days people fell in love much more suddenly than at present, as all ancient stories make manifest; it is not a matter of wonder, therefore, that the hearts of the three cavaliers were completely captured, especially as gratitude was added to their admiration; it is a little singular, however, though no less certain, that each of them was enraptured with one of the beauties. As to the Princesses, they were more than ever struck with the noble demeanour of the captives, and cherished in their breasts all that they had heard of their valour and noble lineage.

The cavalcade resumed its march; the three Princesses rode pensively along on their tinkling palfreys, now and then stealing a glance behind in search of the Christian captives, and the latter were conducted to their allotted prison in the Vermilion Towers.

The residence provided for the Princesses was one of the most dainty that fancy could devise. It was in a tower somewhat apart from the main palace of the Alhambra, though connected with it by the main wall that encircled the whole summit of the hill. On one side it looked into the interior of the fortress, and had at its foot a small garden filled with the rarest flowers. On the other side it overlooked a deep embowered ravine that separated the grounds of the Alhambra from those of the Generalife. The interior of the tower was divided into small fairy apartments, beautifully ornamented in the light Arabian style, surrounding a lofty hall, the vaulted roof of which rose almost to the summit of the tower.

The Princesses had been represented as always cheerful when in the castle of Salobreña; the King had expected to see them enraptured with the Alhambra. To his surprise, however, they began to pine and grow melancholy, and dissatisfied with everything around them.

The King, who was somewhat of a testy, tyrannical disposition, took this at first in high dudgeon; but he reflected that his daughters had arrived at an age when the female mind expands and its desires augment. "They are no longer children," said he to himself, "they are women grown, and require suitable objects to interest them." He put in requisition, therefore, all the dressmakers, and the jewellers, and the artificers in gold and silver throughout the Zacatin of Granada, so that the Princesses were overwhelmed with robes of silk, and of tissue, and of brocade, and cashmere shawls, and necklaces of pearls and diamonds, and rings, and bracelets, and all manner of precious things.

All, however, was of no avail. The Princesses continued pale and languid in the midst of all their finery, and looked like three blighted rosebuds, drooping from one stalk. The King was at his wits' end. He had, in general, a laudable confidence in his own judgment, and never took advice. "The whims and caprices of three marriageable damsels, however, are sufficient," said he, "to puzzle the shrewdest head." So, for once in his life, he called in the aid of counsel.

The person to whom he applied was the experienced duenna.

"Kadiga," said the King, "I know you to be one of the most discreet women in the whole world, as well as one of the most trustworthy; for these reasons I have always continued to keep you about the persons of my daughters. Fathers cannot be too wary in whom they repose such confidence; I now wish you to find out the secret malady that is preying upon the Princesses, and to devise some means of restoring them to health and cheerfulness."

Kadiga promised implicit obedience. In fact, she knew more of the malady of the Princesses than they did themselves. Shutting herself up with them, however, she endeavoured to insinuate herself into their confidence.

"My dear children, what is the reason you are so dismal and downcast, in so beautiful a place, where you have everything that the heart can wish?"

The Princesses looked vacantly round the apartment, and sighed.

"What more, then, would you have? Shall I get you the wonderful parrot that talks all languages and is the delight of Granada?"

"Odious!" exclaimed the Princess Zayda. "A horrid screaming bird, that chatters words without ideas; one must be without brains to tolerate such a pest."

"Shall I send for a monkey from the rock of Gibraltar, to divert you with his antics?"

"A monkey! Faugh!" cried Zorayda; "the detestable mimic of man. I hate the nauseous animal."

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Zorayda . . . warbled a little Arabian air.

"What say you to the famous black singer, Casem, from the royal harem, in Morocco? They say he has a voice as fine as a woman's."

"I am terrified at the sight of these black slaves," said the delicate Zorahayda; "besides, I have lost all relish for music."

"Ah, my child, you would not say so," replied the old woman slyly, "had you heard the music I heard last evening from the three Spanish cavaliers whom we met on our journey. But, bless me, children! what is the matter that you blush so, and are in such a flutter?"

"Nothing, nothing, good mother; pray proceed."

"Well, as I was passing by the Vermilion Towers last evening, I saw the three cavaliers resting after their day's labour. One was playing on the guitar, so gracefully, and the others sang by turns; and they did it in such a style, that the very guards seemed like statues, or men enchanted. Allah forgive me! I could not help being moved at hearing the songs of my native country. And then to see three noble and handsome youths in chains and slavery!"

Here the kind-hearted old woman could not restrain her tears.

"Perhaps, mother, you could manage to procure us a sight of these cavaliers," said Zayda.

"I think," said Zorayda, "a little music would be quite reviving."

The timid Zorahayda said nothing, but threw her arms round the neck of Kadiga.

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed the discreet old woman; "what are you talking about, my children? Your father would be the death of us all if he heard of such a thing. To be sure, these cavaliers are evidently well-bred and high-minded youths; but what of that? They are the enemies of our faith, and you must not even think of them but with abhorrence."

There is an admirable intrepidity in the female will, particularly when about the marriageable age, which is not to be deterred by dangers and prohibitions. The Princesses hung round their old duenna, and coaxed, and entreated, and declared that a refusal would break their hearts.

What could she do? She was certainly the most discreet old woman in the whole world, and one of the most faithful servants to the King; but was she to see three beautiful girls break their hearts for the mere tinkling of a guitar? Besides, though she had been so long among the Moors, and changed her faith in imitation of her mistress, like a trusty follower, yet she was a Spaniard born, and had the lingerings of Christianity in her heart. So she set about to contrive how the wish of the Princesses might be gratified.

The Christian captives, confined in the Vermilion Towers, were under the charge of a big-whiskered, broad-shouldered renegado, called Hussein Baba, who was reputed to have a most itching palm. She went to him privately, and slipped a broad piece of gold into his hand.

"Hussein Baba," said she, "my mistresses, the three Princesses, who are shut up in the tower, and in sad want of amusement, have heard of the musical talents of the three Spanish cavaliers, and are desirous of hearing a specimen of their skill. I am sure you are too kind-hearted to refuse them so innocent a gratification."

"What! and to have my head set grinning over the gate of my own tower! for that would be the reward if the King should discover it."

"No danger of anything of the kind; the affair may be managed so that the whim of the Princesses may be gratified, and their father be never the wiser. You know the deep ravine outside the walls that passes immediately below the tower. Put the three Christians to work there, and, at the intervals of their labour, let them play and sing, as if for their own recreation. In this way the Princesses will be able to hear them from the windows of the tower, and you may be sure of their paying well for your compliance."

As the good old woman concluded her harangue, she kindly pressed the rough hand of the renegado, and left within it another piece of gold.

Her eloquence was irresistible. The very next day the three cavaliers were put to work in the ravine. During the noon-tide heat, when their fellow-labourers were sleeping in the shade, and the guard nodding drowsily at his post, they seated themselves among the herbage at the foot of the tower, and sang a Spanish roundelay to the accompaniment of the guitar.

The glen was deep, the tower was high, but their voices rose distinctly in the stillness of the summer noon.

The Princesses listened from their balcony; they had been taught the Spanish language by their duenna, and were moved by the tenderness of the song. The

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discreet Kadiga, on the contrary, was terribly shocked. "Allah preserve us!" cried she, "they are singing a love-ditty, addressed to yourselves. Did ever mortal hear of such audacity? I will run to the slave master, and have them soundly bastinadoed."

"What! bastinado such gallant cavaliers, and for singing so charmingly!" The three beautiful Princesses were filled with horror at the idea. With all her virtuous indignation, the good old woman was of a placable nature, and easily appeased. Besides, the music seemed to have a beneficial effect upon her young mistresses. A rosy bloom had already come to their cheeks, and their eyes began to sparkle. She made no further objection, therefore, to the amorous song of the cavaliers.

When it was finished, the Princesses remained silent for a time; at length Zorayda took up a lute, and with a sweet, though faint and trembling voice, warbled a little Arabian air, the burden of which was, "The rose is concealed among her leaves, but she listens with delight to the song of the nightingale."

From this time forward the cavaliers worked almost daily in the ravine. The considerate Hussein Baba became more and more indulgent, and daily more prone to sleep at his post. For some time a vague intercourse was kept up by popular songs and romances, which in some measure responded to each other, and breathed the feelings of the parties.

By degrees, the Princesses showed themselves at the balcony, when they could do so without being perceived by the guards. They conversed with the cavaliers also, by means of flowers, with the symbolical language of which they were mutually acquainted; the difficulties of their intercourse added to its charms, and strengthened the passion they had so singularly conceived, for love delights to struggle with difficulties, and thrives the most hardily on the scantiest soil.

The change effected in the looks and spirits of the Princesses by this secret intercourse surprised and gratified the left-handed King; but no one was more elated than the discreet Kadiga, who considered it was all owing to her able management.

At length there was an interruption in this telegraphic correspondence; for several days the cavaliers ceased to make their appearance in the glen. The three beautiful Princesses looked out from the tower in vain. In vain they stretched their swan-like necks from the balcony; in vain they sang like captive nightingales in their cage; nothing was to seen of their Christian lovers; not a note responded from the groves. The discreet Kadiga sallied forth in quest of intelligence, and soon returned with a face full of trouble.

"Ah, my children!" cried she, "I saw what all this would come to, but you would have your way; you may now hang up your lutes on the willows. The Spanish cavaliers are now ransomed by their families; they are down in Granada, and preparing to return to their native country."

The three beautiful Princesses were in despair at the tidings. The fair Zayda was indignant at the slight put upon them, in thus being deserted without a parting word. Zorayda wrung her hands and cried, and looked in the glass, and wiped away her tears and cried afresh. The gentle Zorahayda leaned over the balcony and wept in silence, and her tears fell drop by drop among the flowers of the bank, where the faithless cavaliers had so often been seated.

The discreet Kadiga did all in her power to soothe their sorrow.

"Take comfort, my children," said she, "this is nothing when you are used to it. This is the way of the world. Ah! when you are as old as I am, you will know how to value these men. I'll warrant these cavaliers have their loves among the Spanish beauties of Cordova and Seville, and will soon be serenading under their balconies, and thinking no more of the Moorish beauties in the Alhambra. Take comfort, therefore, my children, and drive them from your hearts."

The comforting words of the discreet Kadiga only redoubled the distress of the three Princesses, and for two days they continued inconsolable. On the morning of the third, the good old woman entered their apartment, all ruffling with indignation.

"Who would have believed such insolence in mortal man," exclaimed she, as soon as she could find words to express herself; "but I am rightly served for having connived at this deception of your worthy father. Never talk more to me of your Spanish cavaliers."

"Why, what has happened, good Kadiga?" exclaimed the Princesses in breathless anxiety.

"What has happened?—treason has happened; or what is almost as bad, treason has been proposed, and to me, the most faithful of subjects, the truest of duennas! Yes, my children, the Spanish cavaliers have dared to tamper with me, that I should persuade you to fly with them to Cordova, and become their wives!"

Here the excellent old woman covered her face with her hands, and gave way to a violent burst of indignation. The three beautiful Princesses turned pale and red, and trembled, and looked down, and cast shy looks at each other, but said nothing. Meanwhile, the old woman sat rocking backward and forward in violent agitation, and now and then breaking out into exclamations: "That ever I should live to be so insulted!—I, the most faithful of servants!"

At length, the eldest Princess, who had most spirit, and always took the lead, approached her, and laying her hand upon her shoulder, said: "Well, mother, supposing we were willing to fly with these Christian cavaliers—is such a thing possible?"

The good old woman paused suddenly in her grief, and looked up.

"Possible!" echoed she; "to be sure it is possible. Have not the cavaliers already bribed Hussein Baba, the renegado captain of the guard, and arranged the whole plan? But, then, to think of deceiving your father—your father, who has placed such confidence in me!"

Here the worthy woman gave way to a fresh burst of grief, and began again to rock backward and forward, and to wring her hands.

"But our father has never placed any confidence in us," said the elder Princess, "but has trusted to bolts and bars, and treated us like captives."

"Why, that is true enough," replied the old woman, again pausing in her grief; "he has, indeed, treated you most unreasonably, keeping you shut up here to waste your bloom in a moping old tower, like roses left to wither in a flower-jar. But, then, to fly from your native land!"

"And is not the land we fly to the native land of our mother, where we shall live in freedom? And shall we not each have a youthful husband in exchange for a severe old father?"

"Why, that again is all very true; and your father, I must confess, is rather tyrannical; but, then," relapsing into her grief, "would you leave me behind to bear the brunt of his vengeance?"

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"By no means, my good Kadiga; cannot you fly with us?"

"Very true, my child; and, to tell the truth, when I talked the matter over with Hussein Baba, he promised to take care of me, if I would accompany you in your flight; but, then, bethink you, my children, are you willing to renounce the faith of your father?"

"The Christian faith was the original faith of our mother," said the eldest Princess; "I am ready to embrace it, and so, I am sure, are my sisters."

"Right again!" exclaimed the old woman, brightening up; "it was the original faith of your mother, and bitterly did she lament, on her death bed, that she had renounced it. I promised her then to take care of your souls, and I rejoice to see that they are now in a fair way to be saved. Yes, my children, I, too, was born a Christian, and have remained a Christian in my heart, and am resolved to return to the faith. I have talked on the subject with Hussein Baba, who is a Spaniard by birth, and comes from a place not far from my native town. He is equally anxious to see his own country, and to be reconciled to the Church; and the cavaliers have promised, that, if we are disposed to become man and wife, on returning to our native land, they will provide for us handsomely."

Gave way to a violent burst of indignation.

In a word, it appeared that this extremely discreet and provident old woman had consulted with the cavaliers and the renegado, and had concerted the whole plan of escape. The eldest Princess immediately assented to it; and her example, as usual, determined the conduct of her sisters. It is true the youngest hesitated, for she was gentle and timid of soul, and there was a struggle in her bosom between filial feeling and youthful passion; the latter, however, as usual, gained the victory, and with silent tears and stifled sighs she prepared herself for flight.

The rugged hill on which the Alhambra is built was in old times perforated with subterranean passages cut through the rock, and leading from the fortress to various parts of the city, and to distant sally-ports on the banks of the Darro and the Xenil. They had been constructed at different times by the Moorish kings as means of escape from sudden insurrections, or of secretly issuing forth on private enterprises.

Many of them are now entirely lost, while others remain, partly choked up with rubbish and partly walled up; monuments of the jealous precautions and warlike stratagems of the Moorish government. By one of these passages Hussein Baba had undertaken to conduct the Princesses to a sally-port beyond the walls of the city, where the cavaliers were to be ready with fleet steeds, to bear the whole party over the borders.

The appointed night arrived; the tower of the Princesses had been locked up as usual, and the Alhambra was buried in deep sleep. Towards midnight, the discreet Kadiga listened from the balcony of a window that looked into the garden. Hussein Baba, the renegado, was already below, and gave the appointed signal.

The duenna fastened the end of a ladder of ropes to the balcony, lowered it into the garden, and descended. The two elder Princesses followed her with beating hearts; but when it came to the turn of the youngest Princess, Zorahayda, she hesitated, and trembled. Several times she ventured a delicate little foot upon the ladder, and as often drew it back, while her poor little heart fluttered more and more the longer she delayed. She cast a wistful look back into the silken chamber; she had lived in it, to be sure, like a bird in a cage; but within it she was secure; who could tell what danger might beset her should she flutter forth into the wide world? Now she bethought herself of the gallant Christian lover, and her little foot was instantly upon the ladder; and anon she thought of her father, and shrank back.

In vain her sisters implored, the duenna scolded, and the renegado reviled beneath the balcony; the gentle little Moorish maid stood doubting and wavering on the verge of elopement; tempted by the sweetness of the sin, but terrified at its perils.

Every moment increased the risk of discovery. A distant tramp was heard. "The patrols are walking the rounds," cried the renegado; "if we linger we perish. Princess, descend instantly, or we leave you."

Zorahayda was for a moment in fearful agitation; then loosening the ladder of ropes, with desperate resolution she flung it from the balcony.

"It is decided!" cried she, "flight is now out of my power! Allah guide and bless ye, my sisters!"

The two eldest Princesses were shocked at the thought of leaving her behind, and would fain have lingered, but the patrol was advancing; the regenado was furious, and they were hurried away to the subterranean passage. They groped their way through a fearful labyrinth, cut through the heart of the mountain, and succeeded in reaching, undiscovered, an iron gate that opened on the outside of the walls. The Spanish cavaliers were waiting to receive them disguised as Moorish soldiers of the guard, commanded by the renegado.

The lover of Zorahayda was frantic when he learned that she had refused to leave the tower; but there was

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"Allah guide and bless ye, my sisters."

no time to waste in lamentations. The Princesses were placed behind their lovers, the discreet Kadiga mounted behind the renegado, and all set off at a round pace in the direction of the pass of Lope, which leads through the mountains towards Cordova.

They had not proceeded far when they heard the noise of drums and trumpets from the battlements of the Alhambra.

"Our flight is discovered," said the renegado.

"We have fleet steeds, the night is dark, and we may distance all pursuit," replied the cavaliers.

They put spurs to their horses, and scoured across the Vega. They reached the foot of the mountain of Elvira, which stretches like a promontory into the plain. The renegado paused and listened. "As yet," said he, "there is no one on our track, we shall make good our escape to the mountains." While he spoke, a pale fire sprang up in a light haze on the top of the watch tower of the Alhambra.

"Confusion!" cried the renegado, "that fire will put all the guards of the passes on the alert. Away! away! Spur like mad—there is no time to be lost."

Away they dashed—the clattering of their horses hoofs echoed from rock to rock, as they swept along the road that skirts the rocky mountain of Elvira. As they galloped on, they beheld that the pale fire of the Alhambra was answered in every direction; light after light blazed on the Atalayas, or watch-towers of the mountains.

"Forward! forward!" cried the renegado: "to the bridge! to the bridge, before the alarm has reached there!"

They doubled the promontory of the mountains, and arrived in sight of the famous Puente del Pinos, that crosses a rushing stream often dyed with Christian and Moslem blood. To their confusion, the tower on the bridge blazed with lights and glittered with armed men. The renegado pulled up his steed, rose in his stirrups and looked about him for a moment; then beckoning to the cavaliers, he struck off from the road, skirted the river for some distance, and then dashed into its waters.

The cavaliers called upon the Princesses to cling to them, and did the same. They were borne for some distance down the rapid current, the surges roared round them, but the beautiful Princesses clung to their Christian knights, and never uttered a complaint. The cavaliers attained the opposite bank in safety and were conducted by the renegado, by rude and unfrequented paths, and wild barrancos, through the heart of the mountains, so as to avoid all the regular passes.

In a word, they succeeded in reaching the ancient city of Cordova; where their restoration to their country and friends was celebrated with great rejoicings, for they were of the noblest families. The beautiful Princesses were forthwith received into the bosom of the Church, and, after being in all due form made regular Christians, were rendered happy wives.

In our hurry to make good the escape of the Princesses across the river, and up the mountains, we forgot to mention the fate of the discreet Kadiga. She had clung like a cat to Hussein Baba, in the scamper across the Vega, screaming at every bound, and drawing many an imprecation from the whiskered renegado; but when he prepared to plunge his steed into the river, her terror knew no bounds. "Grasp me not so tightly," cried Hussein Baba; "hold on by my belt and fear nothing." She held firmly with both hands by the leathern belt that girded the broad-backed renegado; but when he halted with the cavaliers to take breath on the mountain summit, the duenna was no longer to be seen.

"What has become of Kadiga?" cried the Princesses in alarm.

"Allah alone knows!" replied the renegado; "my belt came off when in the midst of the river, and Kadiga was swept with it down the stream. The will of Allah be done! but it was an embroidered belt, and of great price."

There was no time to waste in idle regrets; yet bitterly did the Princesses bewail the loss of their discreet counsellor. That excellent old woman, however, did not lose more than half of her nine lives in the stream; a fisherman, who was drawing his nets some distance down the stream, brought her to land, and was not a little astonished at his miraculous draught. What further became of the discreet Kadiga the legend does not mention; certain it is that she evinced her discretion in never venturing within the reach of Mohamed the Left-handed.

Looking mournfully towards the mountains.

Almost as little is known of the

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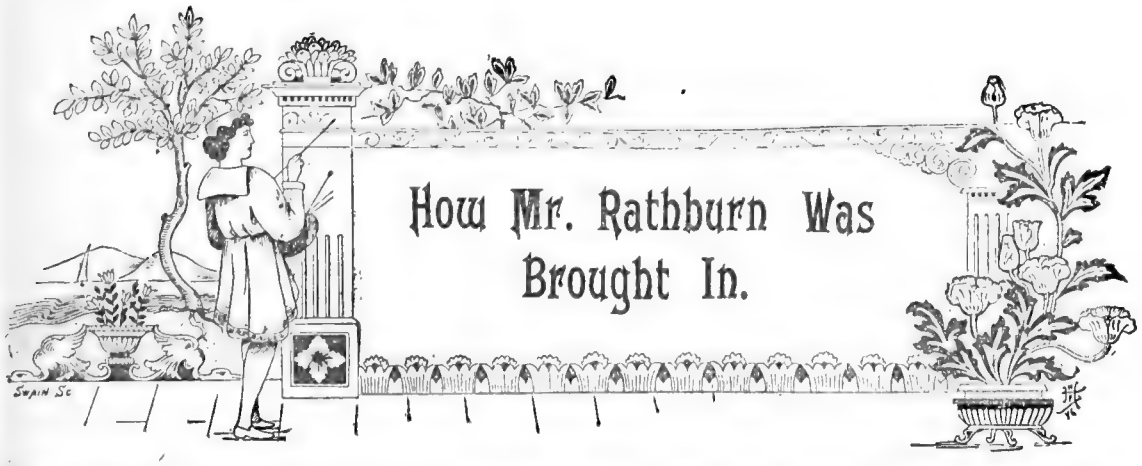
conduct of that sagacious monarch when he discovered the escape of his daughters, and the deceit practised upon him by the most faithful of servants. It was the only instance in which he had called in the aid of counsel, and he was never afterwards known to be guilty of a similar weakness.

He took good care, however, to guard his remaining daughter, who had no disposition to elope; it is thought indeed, that she secretly repented having remained behind.

Now and then she was seen leaning on the battlements of the tower and looking mournfully towards the mountains in the direction of Cordova, and sometimes the notes of her lute were heard accompanying plaintive ditties, in which she was said to lament the loss of her sisters and her lover, and to bewail her solitary life.

She died young, and, according to popular rumour, was buried in a vault beneath the tower; and her untimely fate has given rise to more than one traditionary fable.

BADEM GOUGE.



RATHBURN paced the room with noiseless tread, now and then stopping to look at the tossing figure of the boy upon the cot or to listen to the words he spoke in his delirium.

Once he thought he caught the sounds of hoofs upon the trail, and he halted abruptly as his hand stole beneath the tails of his long English coat.

Mr. Rathburn's nerves were unstrung by the strain imposed upon them by recent and painful events. As he had expressed it to himself half a hundred times that day, "The gentleman who brings me in, whether it's afoot or in a pine box, goes just five thousand dollars to the good," and each time his thoughts had reverted to the powerful inducement the general public had to "bring him in," his hand had stolen beneath the tails of his long English coat; and the comfort he derived from so doing enabled him to say, "It won't be the first who tries, nor the first six who try, but the seventh gets the pot."

Mr. Rathburn had left Denver the morning previous in great and pressing haste, and with a careful avoidance of human kind. He had never been a social man, and the reward of five thousand dollars which was "out" for the man who would bring him in only served to intensify the natural austerity of his character.

The difficulties which beset Mr. Rathburn arose indirectly out of a quiet little game of poker, when the stakes had been high, and when the game had ended (two gentlemen going broke), the tempers of all concerned had been even higher than the stakes.

Mr. Rathburn's honour had been called into question. Certain remarks, chiefly notable because of their extreme brevity and almost brutal frankness, had been directed at him.

What followed was hasty and unpremeditated.

Now that time had given opportunity for reflection, Mr. Rathburn consoled himself with the thought that it was in self-defence. In his view of the matter he stood at variance with that of the public, which was "wilful murder."

Fear of public sentiment had, however, never been a potent factor in Mr. Rathburn's career, but now, for the first time in his life, this sentiment of disapproval was backed by money, and he was aware that several bands of men were patrolling the country, and that the various individuals composing those bands were anxious to get within speaking, or, to be more exact, shooting distance of him.

Rathburn had been making the best of his way over the range that afternoon in the usual unostentatious manner of a man fleeing from justice, when young Gordon saw him from his ranch near the trail and rushed in pursuit. Young Gordon will never know how near he was to death, for Mr. Rathburn turned and faced him, his hand beneath the tails of his long English coat. As a general thing, when people saw Mr. Rathburn's hand disappear behind him, they left precipitately, for that motion and the one which followed it were known to be singularly fatal to human life.

Young Gordon, in ignorance of this fact, had continued his approach, which after all was the best and safest thing he could have done, for Rathburn got a view of his face, and being a student of faces, he instantly decided that young Gordon was not looking for trouble.

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The news of Mr. Rathburn's latest shooting affray had not reached the Foot Hill Ranch, and young Gordon did not know that the Governor of Colorado had deemed it expedient to offer a large reward to the man who would put a check upon Mr. Rathburn's further independent action and hand him over to the proper authorities in Denver. Whether or not Mr. Rathburn was to be turned in alive or dead was left to the taste and judgment of his captor; the prevailing tone of the proclamation suggested, however, that Mr. Rathburn dead was easier to handle than Mr. Rathburn alive, and at present there were bets pending as to the probable appearance Mr. Rathburn would present to the community when on view at the undertaker's shop; for the opinion that he was a "goner" was strong.

Young Gordon's face, white and drawn with sorrow and apprehension, was more eloquent than any words. His brother was sick—dying for all he knew. Would Rathburn remain at the ranch while he went for a doctor? He dared not leave his brother alone. Would Rathburn remain until morning?

Mr. Rathburn had looked down the trail. He was quite sure that somewhere behind him were a number of enterprising gentlemen, and that the reward of five thousand dollars had stimulated a degree of activity which would be his ruin if he lingered. He looked at the mountains beyond, which, when reached, promised safety, and they were very near.

An elevation and generosity of conception characterised many of Mr. Rathburn's acts. Outside of his profession, and when removed from the unworthy and corrupting influence of the flesh, he was not without a certain nobility of soul.

He cast one longing look at the mountains, wavered, and was lost.

Just ten minutes later young Gordon was galloping down the trail at breakneck speed, while Mr. Rathburn remained in attendance upon the sick boy.

As long as there was light in the sky he had turned frequently to the window, and followed with his eyes the dusty streak of grey across the range which marked the windings of the trail, but from without the distance there came neither sound nor sight of life.

By turns, as the night wore on, Mr. Rathburn was nervous and reflective, now sitting in a chair beside the cot, now pacing the floor restlessly. The present experience was a new one for him. To be sure, at various periods of his eventful and not entirely blameless life he had found it both safe and necessary to deprive certain localities of his presence. Perhaps the necessity would again occur if he succeeded in spite of the delay in making good his escape; but he was not prying into the future, the present was enough for him.

It was not long before he had forgotten his own troubles in his interest in the boy upon the cot, and it was borne upon his consciousness that the boy was very ill indeed, and that his fever had reached a crisis that unless a change for the better came before morning he would no longer need the doctor's aid.

The boy was very young, sixteen or seventeen at most.

Mr. Rathburn smoothed his pillow with gentle touch, and seating himself beside the cot took the boy's hand in his own. The boy tossed to and fro, his eyes open and glassy, his skin hot and burning. Mr. Rathburn placed his disengaged hand upon the boy's brow and set himself to work to control and quiet his ravings by his own force of will.

The hours wore on. One, two, three. The little clock on the shelf beside the door ticked them off; still the boy tossed from side to side. But the watcher noticed that from time to time there came moments of quiet to the sufferer. They grew in length and frequency as the hours passed.

"We are getting the better of it," murmured Rathburn hopefully.

"On the whole I am not sorry I stayed."

The hands of the clock were pointing to four, and the cold grey of dawn was stealing over the range shot with rays of light in the east, when Mr. Rathburn pushed back his chair.

The boy was sleeping peacefully, his breath coming soft and regular. For the first time that night Mr. Rathburn discovered that he himself was both tired and sleepy.

He pushed back his chair until he reached the centre of the room, then bringing his feet to an equal elevation with his head by means of a table, he, too, slept.

The sunlight was streaming into the room when sounds on the trail aroused him.

He awoke with a start.

His first glance was at the boy, who was still sleeping. Then he rose and walked to the door.

Four men were cautiously approaching the house, while a fifth held the horses of the party.

Mr. Rathburn recognised the sheriff of Arapahoe County and his deputies, and his hand stole beneath the tails of his long English coat.

He remembered the sleeping boy upon the cot.

Mr. Rathburn stepped into the yard.

"Hush. Don't shoot," he said softly, "I give myself up."

VAUGHAN KESTER.

KEY TO JUMBLED STORY.—No. 16.

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237	163	38	45	227	165	67	122	154
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198	17	103	23	169	194	202	224	90
52	82	13	119	229	211	60	80	49
186	127	2	129	120	166	200	179	71
75	30	175	203	28	147	215	141	83
116	51	1	192	226	86	94	143	126
231	195	6	22	232	133	7	81	213
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54	79	24	42	19	117	107	176	164
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27	65	161	43	216	187	162	151	39
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158	56	62	136	92	132	190	142	205
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223	34	101	20	145	99	131	152	218
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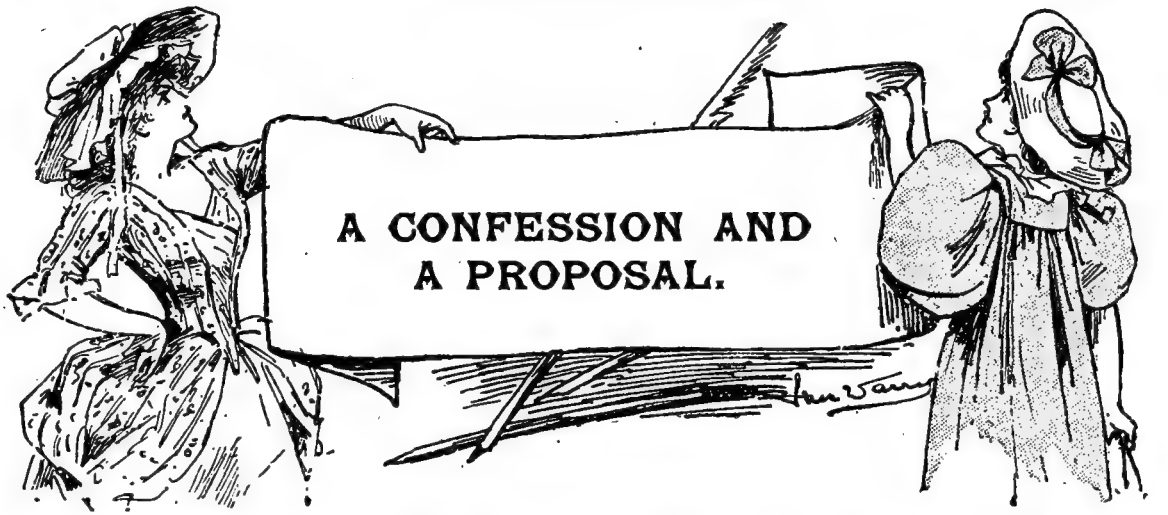

A CONFESSION AND A PROPOSAL.

"ONE of these powders at bed-time, and, if the patient sleeps well, do not disturb him. I will call round in the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied the nurse; and I, Stephen Marsh, physician, buttoned my overcoat closely about my neck, preparatory to facing a sharp, blustering, wintry wind, that was sweeping through the streets of the little town of Baley and moaning about the corners and the chimney-tops with that peculiar sound which heralds the arrival of winter.

My patient was an old man, rich and single, and eccentric. He lay helpless and lonely in his great house, attended by hired servants, and looked in upon occasionally by a maiden sister, scarcely less sour and cold than himself, who shared his home. The cheerless grandeur of the house oppressed me. And the unsympathetic attendance of the hired nurse aroused my impatience, and it was with a feeling of gloom that I took my way homeward through the early shades of the tempestuous night.

Homeward did I say? Well, if a bare, cold room, with a fire-place, chair, and table, could be called home, then I was going home; for I lived in lodgings.

Reaching my own particular den, I turned on the gas at full glow, kicked the smouldering fire into a blaze, tossed my overcoat into a closet, and throwing myself into a chair, placed my feet upon the table, and proceeded to extract comfort from a cigar, while I ruminated upon the baseness of mankind, and the hollow and unsatisfactory conditions of things generally.

I was a bachelor, though I had no idea then that I was an object of commiseration on that account, and though I had been ten years in practice in the town, the marriageable women that I could be said to know socially I could count on my fingers; and not one of them had ever caused my heart to beat a whit faster, nor had their charms filled me with any desire for possession.

My profession was my world; my home my wife, and my books and cigars my children; and, hitherto, they had been adequate to my needs.

But somehow the gruesome image of that old man, lying there amid his cheerless luxury, unloved, unloving, and despised even by his servants, clung to my mind, and I fancied myself at his age in the same situation.

What was to hinder? Here I was at middle age even now growing selfish and morose. Hoarding money too; already there was a goodly pile of it to my credit at the bank, and it was with a great feeling of satisfaction that I added generous sums to it from time to time. What I was going to do with it? Build a hospital? Lose it in the interest of science?

Something suggested, "Build a home with it." What! a home like a miser? "No, a home with wife and children in it." Bah! I ran over in my mind the women I knew. Extravagant display of charms; affected manners, effusive small-talk that bores one to death. Oh, no; their society would drive me frantic.

"Give it to the poor," suggested the voice. The poor! What poor? The whining mendicant at the corner? The pilfering, profane gamins of the street? The bleareyed old women of the stalls, smelling of tobacco and whisky? The labouring class who are out of work? The worthy poor? working girls, widows with children? Their woes are exaggerated; the girls are well-dressed, impudent, saucy. They are comfortable, even if they cannot have everything they want. No; my money is my own. Women are silly, children are an abhorrence. I will not be bothered with either. I will found an institute and spend my money in the interest of medical science. And, throwing away the stump of my cigar, I scowled at the hearth, where the fire had gone out, and picking up my hat I started to seek diversion in the streets, and, perhaps, something else to drive away the blues that had got such a fast hold of me. Just as I reached the stair-landing a shrill scream rang out from a room beyond the hall; a door opened, and a girlish form came hurriedly towards me.

"Oh, Doctor," she cried, "do come to our rooms. My mother—oh, come quickly."

I followed her as she returned through the door, into a cosy-looking room. A grey-haired, regal-looking woman was lying upon a couch apparently in a dead swoon. I went at once to her assistance, while the girl, with a look of pathetic terror on her face, assisted me with brave but trembling hands. Meanwhile she told me that her mother had been ailing for some weeks with a nervous prostration, but that she had never been like this before.

"I am so thankful," she exclaimed, when the invalid had been restored to consciousness, "that you were so near."

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"I am very glad, indeed," I replied, "that you met me in time. I was just going out."

"I thank you so much for your assistance," she said sweetly. And then I noticed, as she looked up at me, what great, pathetic, soulful eyes she had, and what a sweet, brave, patient face.

Just then the invalid opened her heavy eyes and looked up, and asked faintly:

"What is it, Agnes? Did I faint?"

"Yes, mother dear: but you are better now. This is Dr. Marsh, mother. I was a little frightened, and called him in."

"You were very kind, sir; I hope I am not going to be ill," said the invalid, speaking to me.

"I think not, madam," I said, as hopefully as I could. "Your system seems a trifle weakened, as by some over-exertion. I think that a few days of entire rest, a good nourishing diet, and a few simple medicines which I will prepare for you to-morrow, will restore you."

As I spoke I caught a swift glance as it passed between mother and daughter, a glance which seemed to express a trifle of dismay and much of anxiety.

As I lingered a few moments to note the symptoms of my patient, I glanced about the room with feelings of curious interest in these newly-found neighbours. The room was exquisitely cosy, and full of sweet feminine touches; but my masculine mind could not distinguish whether the lace curtains at the windows were of silk or cheap cotton, or whether the bright carpet was moquette or an imitation.

I knew that everything was in perfect order, and pervaded with a home-like air, that no bachelor with millions at his disposal could produce. But I had a vague idea that it was cheap, very cheap. I knew the girl's dress was of calico, and yet there was a fit, a hang, a what-do-you-call-it air about it that many a tea-gowned girl might strive vainly to attain. Yes, they were poor, I concluded—comfortably poor.

Evidently they had seen better days, for no two such queenly and self-possessed women could ever have known any real grinding poverty, such as hunger, cold, and the like. Such poverty degrades, and these women bore the stamp of highest culture and refinement.

I finally rose to go, finding no further excuse for lingering.

"And what is your fee, sir?" asked Agnes, looking up at me with such a strange sensation of uneasiness somehow.

"Ten-and-six," I said, simply, because I could think of no way to refuse the customary fee.

She took a tiny purse from her pocket, and handed me two little coins as carelessly as though there were thousands at the back of it.

But there was no rattle of any other in the purse, and it was too small to contain any notes. I took the money mechanically and bade her summon me if her mother grew worse, and said "good-night."

"Good-night," she said with a smile, "and thank you for coming."

Ere I crossed the hall I found I had left my cane. I turned back at once. The door was ajar. I lifted my hand to knock, when I caught sight of Agnes, standing by the table in the lamplight, the little purse in her hand, and a look of absolute terror on her face.

"The last sixpence!" I heard her murmur, as she threw the purse on the table. "Oh, what shall I do?"

I hurried away to my rooms. The two little coins were still in my hand burning and stinging my palm. How I hated them and myself at that moment. How could I return them to her? I must do it some way at once.

Stepping back into the hall, I tramped loudly, and, approaching her door, knocked.

"Pardon me!" I said, as Agnes appeared; "but I believe I left my cane."

"You did," she replied, handing it to me.

I took the cane. "Miss—ah! Miss," I stammered; and as the girl raised her face to listen, it seemed as though she were looking down upon me. "I hope—I—that is—I trust you will not—hesitate to call me if your mother should grow worse in the night."

"I will not, I assure you, and thank you."

I went back to my rooms, feeling somehow that I had grown some inches smaller in stature. Heavens! how that hateful money burned in my hand. And yet, for my life, I could not have offered them to that proud girl. They were mine. I had earned them. She would have regarded them as nothing less than charity, and I could scarcely dare offer that to either of those women.

They were comfortably poor—ah!

I went to bed to toss and dream, and listen, at intervals, half hoping to hear a timid knock at the door; I was not called, however.

Neither was I the next day.

I hung around my room nearly all the morning, but received no summons from the neighbours across the hall, nor did I catch any glimpse of Agnes. In the afternoon I went to call on Anson Sprague, and found him grim and gloomy as ever. I made my visit short.

When I returned I met Agnes on the stairs, and but for the experience of the previous evening, I should have taken her for the cherished daughter of some aristocratic family. I inquired after the mother, and was informed that she was not much better. And I could see that the girl was anxious and troubled, yet she did not ask me to call. How could she, when she knew I should demand ten-and-six, and she had already given me her "last sixpence"?

She carried a package in her hand, and as she passed out into the street, I followed. I kept her easily in sight for several streets, until she crossed a bridge which led into a different portion of the town. I still followed, and was not surprised when at last she entered a pawnshop. When she came out again she no longer carried the parcel. Turning homeward again, she entered a grocer's, and later emerged, carrying several small bundles.

I went back to my rooms and determined upon a plan of action. After a while I heard her climb wearily up the stairs and pass into her room.

I waited an hour and then went to their door and knocked. Agnes admitted me, seeming half glad, half embarrassed, and led me at once to her mother, who still lay upon the couch.

By her side stood a little table, upon which I noticed a dish or two, which Agnes hurriedly carried away. The mother looked pale and distressed; but Agnes's proud face betrayed no emotion except concern for the invalid.

"As you have not sent for me," I said carelessly, "I have taken the liberty of calling in a neighbourly way."

"You are very kind," said Agnes, with a smile that lit up the seriousness of her face like sunshine.

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The mother smiled too, a very languid, tired smile. She had the same high-bred countenance as her daughter, and her hair lay in silver masses above her white temples.

She was a very beautiful woman, but such an expression of utter weariness I had never seen on a human countenance.

"Will you please tell me what you think of mamma's case, doctor?" asked Agnes.

"Looks like a case of"—starvation I had almost said—"entire prostration—over-work—over-worry—something of the kind. It is a case in which little medicine is required or desirable. Plenty of indulgent nursing, entire absence of care, and the most nourishing food that can be procured." Here I caught a look of pain on Agnes's face, but I went on heartlessly: "Some choice wine would be beneficial, and fruits, if it is necessary to tempt her appetite. She seems much debilitated, and needs a toning up."

Agnes remained silent, but the mother spoke with a forced cheerfulness:

"I am sure I shall do very nicely. Agnes is a capital nurse, and I have no doubt I shall be entirely recovered in a few days. Thank you for your advice."

I rose to go. Agnes rose too, still silent, and avoided my eyes.

"I will prepare a mild stimulant, which your mother will find beneficial," I said. "Will you come for it in the morning at nine?"

"Yes, I will come," she answered.

She came punctually at nine, half to my surprise—came in with a brave smile, strangely at variance with the dark shadows and the tired look about her eyes. I handed her a chair, but she refused to sit down.

"Sit down, please," I said rather peremptorily. "I have something to say to you—a confession to make; and I hope you will willingly absolve my crime, for I assure you it was unintentional."

"A confession!" she exclaimed, dropping into the chair.

"Yes. You will remember that I went back after my cane the night I first called to see your mother?"

"Yes."

"Well, I overheard your exclamation, as you stood with your purse in your hand, from which you had just given me 'the last sixpence.'"

"You did!" she exclaimed, while her face flushed hotly.

"I did. And, further, when you went out yesterday I had the meanness to follow you. You went to a pawnshop, you stopped at a grocer's to purchase food, you returned home."

"Well, sir, and what is all this to you?" she exclaimed, with angry eyes and quivering lips. "What business had you following me?"

"None, whatever," I said. "I told you I committed a crime, and asked you to forgive me at the start. Please be calm and hear me out, and I will try to convince you that I did not act with any desire to pry into your private affairs."

Under the force of my stronger will and my sincerity she sank back in the chair.

"Miss Agnes," I said, "if you are in embarrassed circumstances, I assure you that both you and your mother have my warmest sympathy, and I would be only too glad to do you any service." The half-sovereign and the sixpence lay on the table. "If you knew how I hated the sight of them," I said. "If you knew how small—how miserably mean I felt; how they haunted me and taunted me the whole night after I heard you say that, I am sure you would forgive my seeming impertinence.

"Miss Agnes, I could never clothe my meaning in seductive words. If a man is dying and asks me for the truth, I give it to him. I am nothing if not blunt, or, at least, plain; but I claim to be an honest man and a gentleman, and if you care to give me your confidence, you will not find it misplaced. The causes of your mother's present condition are over-worry and poor living. She needs all that I have told you, and must have it. If you desire it I will take her case professionally, furnish all medicines and other necessities, and you can repay me at your leisure."

I paused, and waited for a reply.

"You are extremely kind, doctor, and I believe you sincere," she said, in a voice which tried hard not to break down. "You must pardon my hasty temper. We are extremely poor, mother and I, but heretofore I have made comfortable wages at my occupation as bookbinder, but a change in the firm a few weeks ago threw me out of employment. But I am still searching every day. I will find something to do, surely, and if you will attend to mamma, it will take such a load off my heart; and, oh! doctor, I thank you so much. I never could tell anybody before," and the proud head went down on the table with a sob, while I—well, I felt as any man does, I suppose, when he sees a woman cry.

It didn't last long. She lifted her face with a smile, and rose to go, after again expressing her thanks.

"Stay," I said. "Would you go and read to an invalid—one of my patients—for a few hours each afternoon, for a compensation?"

"Ah, yes," she replied eagerly. "Indeed I would be glad to."

Accordingly, after that each afternoon found Agnes reading sonnets and love-stories to old Anson Sprague, at the rate of a good round sum per hour, and the old man thrived so well under this new treatment that I found myself in a fair way to lose my wealthy patient.

It happened sometimes that we walked home together; and to atone, as it were, for leaving the mother alone so much through the day, we gave her double company in the evening.

One chill night, as we hurried home through the wind, walking close together that we could better breast the storm, Agnes told me with a little embarrassed laugh that Anson Sprague had that day asked her to be his wife.

I stopped her short in the middle of a crossing.

"Heavens! What did you tell him?"

She laughed again—a tantalising little laugh that she had learnt of late.

"I told him," she said (though I could never quite believe her), "that you had constituted yourself my guardian; I would consult you about it, and abide by your decision."

"You did well, Agnes," I replied greatly relieved. "Darling, you are the sunshine of my life. I once made a confession to you, and now I make a proposal. Sweet one, do I ask in vain?"

* * * * *

We were married; and, what with the building of a home, with the dainty furnishings of an invalid's chamber, with milliner's bills, and something aside for the future little shoes and stockings, and my wife's increasing demands for charity funds, the medical institute is still a castle in the air, and the blues have gone to inhabit it.

ESTHER NOANES.

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HOW MADAME PERROTT'S HAIR TURNED WHITE.

It was in Paris, in the year 18—, Madame Perrott, twenty years of age, sat waiting impatiently for her maid, whose task it was to undo the wonderful superstructure of hair which had excited so much admiration at the dinner from which the lady had just returned.

Every hair of all those golden braids and puffs grew on Madame Perrott's own head. It was the envy of every woman who really believed in it, and it was too great a task to unbind and comb it for the night with her own hands.

"Where was Felice? Why did she not come? She knew her duty; she had always been at her post before."

Madame Perrott rang the bell again.

"Send Felice to me at once," she said, as the servant opened the door.

"I have been searching for Felice ever since I received madame's directions," said the woman, in rather an injured tone. "I do not think that she can be in the house. Indeed, if madame will permit me, I think I can guess. The other servants have been talking for some time. Felice is in the habit of going out of evenings. Felice has a lover."

"Indeed," said Madame Perrott, who had some idea of propriety. "Well, pretty girls generally have *beaux*. Only she should not find him so fascinating as to forget her duties."

"If madame will permit a few more words, the servants say that this *beau* of Felice's is a gentleman—not a man of her own position," continued the old woman, "and that—but no matter; it is none of my business, only young girls were more prudent in my days."

"I will speak to Felice," said madame. "It was right of you to mention it."

Then she sank back in her chair and waited a little longer. She did not wait patiently, however, and she remembered afterwards that she felt very strangely. She was not a nervous person, her imagination was not strong, and she was in her own cosy room, pretty with paint and gilding, portraits of pretty women and china statuettes of *belles* and *beaux* in the costume of Louis the Fourteenth. Lace-curtained and gas-lit, the least ghostly place that one could fancy; and yet a gloom and dread, for which she had no words, began to settle down upon her. She shuddered, she grew cold, she dared not look behind her, she fancied strange voices were borne to her on the breeze, that lifted the curtains over the open windows.

In the darkest, most uncanny place, she could not have suffered more from these vague terrors, which were more poignant because she was totally unused to them.

In the adjoining room Monsieur Perrott and some old friends drank wine and played *écarté*.

She would have gone to them had she dared, but she dreaded the long corridor too much. She absolutely did not dare open the door.

Perhaps, indeed, she said to herself, these terrible feelings were really premonitions of evil. Someone who knew the value of the jewels she had worn that day might have followed her home, might be lurking outside the door, might be hidden even in the chamber—for instance, behind the great bed, with its lace hangings, or in the tall wardrobe. The idea of a black-visaged ruffian was so terribly vivid that Madame Perrott actually gave a little scream, and, seizing the small silver handbell which stood upon the table near her, rang it violently.

It was in this way that she was wont to summon Felice from her own little room. The servants only answered the bell which communicated with the kitchen, but Madame Perrott had now become too nervous to cross the room to touch it.

She rang the little silver bell. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! its voice rang in the air; tinkle, tinkle, tinkle! clink! as she dropped it on the table again; but as she did so, and looked over her shoulder towards the door, hoping that someone had heard it, the door opened and Felice entered slowly.

Her face was very pale; her large dark eyes were darker than ever. She made her little curtsey, and stood before Madame Perrott with her hands folded together.

"You have been a long while in coming," said Madame Perrott; "I have been waiting for you two hours. This must never happen again."

"No, madame," said Felice in a low voice, "never again."

"See that it does not," said madame, tossing her jewels upon her toilet-table, and beginning to disrobe herself. "My dressing-gown, Felice."

The girl already held it in her hands. Usually she was brisk and active in her movements; to-night she was strangely slow and solemn.

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"If it were my shroud you could not be graver over it," cried Madame Perrott. "There, comb my hair and go; you are too frightfully solemn to endure any longer."

Felice took the comb in her hand, but did not smile.

"Is it madame's will that I should comb her hair?" she said.

"Of course," cried Madame Perrott.

"It is madame's will?" repeated Felice.

"Have you gone crazy, Felice?" cried Madame Perrott. "Have you not done it every night for a year?"

"If it be madame's will I must do it," said Felice in the same strange way, as she stepped behind the lady's chair.

Slowly the great masses of golden floss fell about the lady's shoulders. Softly the maid gathered them under her hands and began to pass the comb through them. As she did so Madame Perrott experienced such a shock as one receives from an electric battery.

"What a strange feeling!" she cried.

Again the comb entered her hair. Again she experienced the singular sensation.

"What are you doing to me, Felice?" she cried, starting to her feet. "What are you doing to me? You——"

But there was no one there; the door had not opened or shut. Felice had been standing behind her the instant before. Now she was gone. Gone where? Gone how? Madame Perrott turned. The dread of she knew not what was heavier than before; and, besides that, every hair on her head seemed to be rising at its roots, and she seemed conscious of every nerve in her body. She could neither scream nor run.

All that she could do was to drag herself to the bed and draw the coverlet over her head. Whether she fainted or lost consciousness she never knew.

It was late when she awoke; the sun streamed across the room. The hands of the alabaster clock upon the mantelpiece pointed to the hour of ten; but instead of the usual domestic rounds of the hour she was conscious of a strange bustle and confusion.

Resting her elbow on the pillow, she listened. She could distinguish her husband's voice and the shrill notes of the woman who had talked with her about her maid the night before, and she thought she heard the name Felice repeated in tones of horror more than once. At last she was certain. Felice, Felice—they were all talking about Felice. What was it? Why did he not come to her and tell her?

In a moment more the door opened, and Monsieur Perrott, wrapped in his quilted dressing-gown, came in. His face was very grave.

"You are awake, my love?" he asked.

"Yes, I am awake. What has happened?"

"You heard the noise, then? Yes, something has happened—something terrible. Your maid Felice is dead; she has taken poison. Her mother, a washerwoman, lives in the Rue St. Cyr. She went there yesterday afternoon, and this morning she was found dead in bed. The lamentations of the poor woman wakened me. She had brought a note which Felice had left for you. Shall I read it?"

"Yes, *mon ami*," said Madame Perrott, trembling violently.

The husband went towards the window, and drew up the blind.

"Adored madame,"—(he began) "I shall never dress that beautiful hair again. I knew it when I arranged it an hour ago. When you return home, Felice will be dead. She is too miserable to live. Ah, madame, when you touch that little bell I have obeyed so long, it seems to me that my spirit must hear it, and come to you again. Amongst the strange thoughts in my distracted mind this one is very strong. Yes, it is possible I may return to you, though never in the flesh. Adieu, beloved mistress; pray that the soul of the miserable Felice may repose in peace."

"Henri!" cried Madame Perrott, with a scream. "Oh, Henri, this is terrible! Felice undressed my hair herself, at midnight. Felice, who was then dead. Come to me! Let me touch you! Save me from this great terror that is gathering about me!"

Monsieur Perrott flew to his wife's side. The light from the open window fell across the pillow, and over the beautiful head that lay upon it. He stared at it for a moment.

"*Mon Dieu!* my child!" he cried, amazed and horrified. "What has happened? Your hair has turned white!"

It was true; in all those flowing locks not one thread of gold now lingered. They were as white as snow.

And this is how Madame Perrott's hair turned white at the age of twenty, and she did not bleach it, as some folks pretend.

AGNES JEWLY.

You have probably noticed - - - - On the Second Page of Cover - A Coupon. -

This coupon may mean a difference of £100 to you, or to your neighbour. A similar one has appeared regularly every week in *Short Stories* and *Pearson's Weekly* since the beginning of January, and will continue to appear until the end of December.

Cut each of them out and keep them.

For to the reader who, on the 1st of January, 1897, sends in the greatest number, we are going to give

ONE HUNDRED SOVEREIGNS.

The best way to preserve them is to paste them into an exercise book, on one side of the paper only.

DO NOT SEND ANY IN BEFORE THE 1st OF JANUARY, 1897.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION. NO. 17.

THE first correct solution to hand was received from Mr. C. J. Lewis, jun., 7, Tonsley Place, Wandsworth, S.W. The provincial guinea goes to Mr. Geo. Humphreys, 19, Colville Street, Nottingham.

POST-CARD COMPETITION. NO. 19.

A GUINEA is offered to the first reader who discovers the longest word on pages 605 to 608, the letters of which will form an anagram of two words. Another guinea goes to the reader living more than 100 miles from London under the same conditions. Example: ELAPSED—*Sad Peel*.

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Or, THE ROMANCE OF A LOST CONTINENT.

By GEO. C. WALLIS, Author of "*The Winning of Gunhild*," etc.

SUMMARY.

ARNON'S memory of his early days begins at a time when he finds himself abandoned on the seashore, whence he discovers the cave of a band of pirates, by whom he is captured. Under the care of Didron the Chief he grows up as one of them, and on the death of the former he takes command. Viol is the daughter of Didron and marries Arnon, who, on one of his voyages, lands at Miropis and consults the Priest of the Spirit of Truth, from whom he learns that within a year and a half he will be a captive in a foreign land, and that he need not fear death until he has visited the Grotto of the Sleeper three times. On returning, he finds his ship burnt and men killed. After fighting he escapes, and meets and falls in love with Briseis, daughter of King Dulo X. of Atlantis, and to her he reveals his identity. Vichri, Briseis' cousin and lover, believes Arnon to be dead. For several months he lives at the Court; but the old roving spirit returns, and he sets out to discover the cave of treasure left by Didron and his band. On his return from an unsuccessful attempt, he finds his identity discovered by King Dulo, and is sent away as a galley slave. During his absence in a small boat up a creek on the Coast of Nubia, the ship is taken by rebels. Led by Arnon, the whole of the population, starving and fearing annihilation by the rebels, set out for another town. His followers are routed, and he is captured by Asos, an Egytian captain, by whom he is taken to Memphis. He saves from a leopard, Vesta, the daughter of a priest, and himself becomes a priest. He defeats a plot to dethrone the King, thereby gaining the favour of the latter, who is in ignorance of Arnon's former pirate life. Itaska, a woman whose love he rejects, discovers the story of his past, and is about to reveal it to the King, when Mitres, the father of Vesta, now married to Arnon, hears of her intention, and consults with Arnon.

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE STORMY SEA.

AT last I broke the spell, saying:

"There is no way out of the danger save by taking ship and leaving Khem, going I care not whither, so long as Vesta and yourself are with me."

"Take Vesta and go," the old man said, in a choking voice, "you have a swift ship on the great sea and can sail hence without suspicion, for the plotters will wait to act till you return, and I shall wish them joy of their waiting."

"But why not come with us?" I urged.

"I am a priest of Amun, a native of Egypt, and I should count it blackest treason to turn my back upon my King and country," he replied, with quiet dignity. "Nay, hear me out. Go, seek liberty and happiness in some other clime, with my daughter as your wife, and I will bide here to the end, for no man hath aught against me, and I would fain be embalmed and lie with my fathers."

Just then the door swung softly open, and Vesta entered, clad in a robe of faultless white, her fair hair rising from her head in a graceful crown, and love shining from her eyes. Her father groaned when he saw her.

"What ails thee, father, dear?" she asked, twining her soft arms round his grizzled neck.

"Only this, daughter," he said, "that to-morrow I say farewell to thee for ever."

"Wherefore?" said my fair, looking at me wonderingly.

I told her all my story, and what her father had overheard that morning in the Place of Council, and that we must sail thence on the morrow.

"But whither?" asked she.

Then I told them of the isles I had passed in the sea that we in Atlantis called the Eastern Ocean, but which from Egypt was to the south-west, and which could be reached, I doubted not, through the western strait of the Great Sea. I said that thither I would sail, and there, among that gentle race of islanders, find a safe haven in which to live and die in peace.

"And thou wilt go with me?" I asked of Vesta, though I had small need.

"Where thou goest, there will I go, husband," she answered. "It grieves me, though, that my father will not travel with us."

"Grieve not for me," said Mitres, though his face was hard set to hide his emotion, "I am safe and you two are in danger, so I must needs bear the sorrow when you are gone, and it will be tempered by the knowledge that I have saved you."

I left them, then, to go to the palace, where I sat at table with Pharaoh for the last time, and never before had I been so jovial in his presence, and never before so attentive to false Itaska, whose coldness melted swiftly under my flattering phrases. Asos was away on a distant mission, and the Queen but newly delivered of a son, so that the feast was not over-thronged that night.

As midnight neared, Mitres entered, and he, too, was never so brimful of quaint sayings and quaking mirth as at that last banquet I attended in the gilded room. I drank little wine but that of Mareotis, and once, when pledging Itaska in a draught of her favourite Thasian, I murmured:

"Seemeth that never till to-night have I looked on love with love's eyes."

She started out of her stately calm at that, her face flushing with the import of the words, and her hand sought mine, yet she said nothing.

"Did you know, fair one," I asked, "that to-morrow I sail for a pleasure cruise with my wife?"

She did not, and seemed surprised.

"Would you be glad," I whispered under my breath, "if this priest's daughter, of whom I am weary, were left behind in the sea-depths, that I might come back alone to bask in your smile?"

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Her eyes flashed fire, and the hand that clasped mine burned with a sudden heat.

"Glad above all things," she replied, speaking low. "Art a bold wooer when you do begin, though tardy at beginning!" and then we said no more, except in the general talk.

Next morning I snatched a short sleep, and before the most of the citizens were abroad, took boat adown the Nile to where the *Seamew* lay. I shall never forget the mute sadness of that parting between Vesta and her father on the shore of the sluggish stream. Tears rolled down the old man's face as he embraced his daughter for the last time and saw us drifting away, leaving him alone in his land of mighty monuments and spacious temples. Down the river we swept with the current, Vesta and I, and that was the last we saw of him, standing there on the bank, waving his hand to us as long as our eyes could see. Then he was out of sight, and sweeping on, we came in due time to my vessel.

The crew were soon aboard and at their places, the anchor raised and the sails set, and under a favouring wind we stood out from the westernmost of old Nile's many mouths, and after coasting along the shore for a time, struck out northward, taking our last glimpse of the land of Khem as the evening sun sank beneath the leeward horizon in a blaze of golden glory.

"Glad above all things," she replied.

Then on sped the *Seamew*, ever keeping west by night and day, the men marvelling at my hurry, till we reached and passed the huge rock that rises up to the north of the strait, and emerged upon the boundless waters of that trackless sea upon whose bosom, somewhere I knew, reposed those fairy isles I sought, wherein to be at peace.

But as it had happened nearly a dozen years ago, when I searched for the treasure-cave and found it not, my reckoning seemed at fault again, and though I ploughed that watery waste for many weary weeks, north, south, east and west, and tired out my men with ceaseless voyagings, those isles seemed to have vanished as utterly as though the liquid element had gathered them into its insatiable maw.

No land, no shelving shores with verdant hills behind, no rippling streams pouring into lovely little bays, no mimic breakers on low, grey cliffs, no tiny boats nor long canoes with fair-skinned oarsmen, darting out of shady creeks, no smoke arising from the household fires of island villages.

Everywhere was water, water, water, until at last I lost my reckoning of the way we had gone, and the crew murmured openly as each day plunged us deeper in the unknown waste.

Then one day a gale arose. The wind blew with unabating force, and the *Seamew* shot forward like the bird whose name she bore, the spray flying from our stem and falling in harmless showers across our bows, the wind whistling through our rigging.

On we flew on the wings of the gale, the ropes singing in the breeze, and the spars humming.

The gale still grew in strength, veering round slowly to the north-east, that day and the next, and with the third sun had risen to a tearing tempest more terrible than any other I have known; so fierce its vigour, so high its rollers, so angry its hissing spray.

Our sails were furled and the helm lashed to keep the ship's head to the wind, and thus, bare-poled, wave-swept, reeling and staggering under the buffetings of the curling masses of white-flecked water and the mighty gusts of wind, the *Seamew* held her way, driven like a feather before the storm, her light hull now half-buried under the green billows, now falling headlong into the trough of the sea, now climbing the foaming crest of a liquid mountain, but ever righting herself and ever speeding on, with creaking timbers and straining cords.

My men, for the most part, had now lost heart, having never seen so wild a sea before, and Vesta clung to me in terror as the little vessel rocked and tossed, a helpless mite in the grasp of the cruel flood, but reckless as ever, now that I was in my element, I lashed my fair-haired dear to the stern-post, and stood by the helm, rallying my crew on their cowardice, and anon singing the rolling chant I had known in my early roving days.

Thus mocked and chidden, the Egyptians waxed wrath, many of them reviling me for having led them into the danger and going below to drown their fear in strong liquor, while others, amongst whom was Macis, remained on deck, mute, white faced, holding on to what came nearest to them, taking my scathing sneers in silence.

Now the wind ceased suddenly, the clouds thickened in an arch o'erhead, a patch of sky on the eastern horizon glowed with lurid light menacingly, and the air grew dreadfully oppressive in the darkening stillness. It was then, as near as I could calculate, about the hour of noon.

I had barely time to unlash the helm and put it hard round to bring the ship facing the point of lurid light—whence I knew the gale would come with redoubled fury—when a distant rumbling burst the awful spell, and the tempest was upon us with a mighty roar that seemed to split the very skies, the cloud-masses were riven asunder, and a vivid blaze of light lit up the wild and desolate scene, showing us in that one instant a great, curling wall of water, foam-crested, rushing along the surface of the sea, which in front was flattened down by the impetus of the hurricane's breath.

A few great drops fell pattering on the deck; then the thunder rolled again, the lightning flashed, and the roaring wall of water overtook us, shook us in its grip as an angry dog shakes a rat, and then passed on.

At last, having drunk themselves into a frenzy, the thirty Egyptians who had gone below came up, blaspheming and threatening as they staggered across the slippery deck, three of them, maddened into courage by drink and terror, flourishing their daggers at me as they came.

It was a fearful moment, for if I left the helm to swing loose we should be capsized, without a doubt, while to defend myself whilst holding it was impossible. Vesta swooned with fear.

"Back, madmen!" I cried hoarsely, "and sheath your knives! And you who are sober—seize them, for all are doomed if I let go the rudder."

The three wretches paid no heed to my entreaty, and the

others were too fearful of their skins to stir a step upon the wave-washed boards.

"Your blood be on your own heads, then!" I cried, "put one foot forward and I let go!"

It was true that but for me they would not have come to this pass, but the misfortune fell on me equally with them. Had I reached the fair islands of my quest, I would have rewarded them handsomely, but fate having decreed otherwise, it was so ill to turn on me when I was doing my best, that I felt no pity for them when they put my life in danger.

With mocking laughs, and pitching steps, the three came on, knives uplifted, eyes glaring wildly; the others looking on in stupefied despair, not budging a step to my relief.

"Your blood be on your own heads!" I cried again, letting the tiller fly as it listed, drawing "Sunderer" from its sheath and laying the foremost traitor dead at my feet with one swift stroke.

The second hurled his dagger at me, and, passing my ear with an angry hiss, it was transfixed in the stern-post—for I was between him and the stern, then—and there stuck, but the length of a finger above Vesta's head. That wretch the sword made short work of, but the third crept round the mast with the cunning of insanity and was about to plunge his weapon into my back with all his force, when, like an intervention of the spirits, a brilliant blaze of light lit up the heavens, the mast was split from top to bottom with a loud crash, a strong smell of sulphur filled the air, and a lambent flame played on my sword and on the upraised dagger that I saw with a backward glance and shone upon the blade that gleamed above my dear one's head.

A moment only I saw all this, and the figure of the traitor, clothed in fire, when the blackness blotted out all sight, the thunder rolled, and with a grinding crash the guideless *Seamew* struck on a sunken rock!

She heeled over, began to fill rapidly, and a heavy sea washed across the slanting deck. To save myself I drove the sword into the timber on which I stood, and held on to it with all the strength of my iron fingers, and so good was "Sunderer's" steel, so powerful my grasp, that when the flood had drained away, I still hung there, safe.

That great flash and thunder roll was the climax of the storm, I think, for the sea calmed and the wind went down a short time after the ship struck.

I had now time to look around me, and saw Vesta standing where I had bound her—the dagger still sticking in the stern-post above—alive, but in an agony of dread. As for the crew, not one was left on board, all were swept into the pitiless sea, gone under for ever, lost through their own malice or apathy.

Assured of this and of the temporary stability of the vessel, I crept to Vesta's side, unloosened some of the cords, chafed her cold, wet hands, and seeing her eyes open, looking into mine with recognition, spoke words of courage and of comfort in her ear.

Night passed, and the day dawned, calm, smiling, sunny, as though the sky and sea had never worn an evil face, but had always been as they then were—bright and beautiful in their blue immensity. Not a sail was visible on the broad expanse, so that we two were alone with our thoughts on the solitary wreck.

"'Twere folly to stay here," I said, "for if the next storm does not send this smitten ship to the bottom, we shall die of thirst and hunger. We must make a raft as best we can."

Vesta assented to my plan, and so, after a good meal and a rehabilitation of our attire from the ship's store, we set to work in earnest, and it was wonderful how deft my Vesta's slender fingers were at tying the most incomprehensible knots in the thongs and cords with which we bound the decking planks together.

Having laden our new sea-going craft with as much food and water as she could carry—which was scanty enough—we put forth on the unknown waters, steering, by the sun and stars, a westerly course.

The sea continued calm, and the sky unclouded, and the straight downpouring of the burning solar rays told me that we moved in the tropic regions. Day succeeded night, and night followed on the heels of day, the sun curved slightly to the south at noon, showing that we drew north as well as west, and still the ring of sky and sea remained unbroken by a passing sail or a speck of land.

I rowed while Vesta steered, save when a favourable breeze let us put up our little sail to gain a spell of rest; and ever our stores lessened and lessened, till the water was well nigh gone.

Yet my fair Egyptian made no murmur, no complaint, bearing it all with a fortitude that amazed, and at the same time served to cheer me, for if a frail woman, born in the midst of luxury, could brave this hardship so well, surely I who had looked death in the face half-a-dozen times already could keep a stout heart through it all?

But at last one drink of water alone remained, and after that—all the horrors of unquenched thirst, or the fierce madness that follows on a draught of the salt-laden waves that danced about us in tantalising mockery.

Over that last drop of water we strove for a day, each desiring that the other should take it as the last chance of survival, and in the end, in consequence of my pleadings and violent threats, Vesta yielded to my wishes, though she did it grudgingly.

During the coolness of the night that followed I endured the thirst fairly well, but the next day, under the scorching heat, without a shadow beneath which to shelter, the agony became terrible, and Vesta, too, was little better than myself.

The sky seemed an arch of burning brass, and the sea a bath of molten silver, coruscating on the tops of its emerald hillocks with insufferable brilliancy, and dazzling our jaded eyes with its unceasing restlessness.

Two more days passed in excruciating suffering, and with throats parched, tongues blackened, and eyes bloodshot with straining over the changeless seascape, we sat upon our raft, food gone now as well as water, hope gone too, care nearly vanished, desperation bordering on frenzy the one remaining emotion that held us. Despite my warnings Vesta made several efforts to snatch a drink of the briny flood, and only my stronger arm prevented her.

Her head upon my arm in those sad, last moments—calm now the end was near—she lay and looked into my agonised face with love shining still from her sweet, confiding eyes.

"Say, darling," she whispered, her voice so low that I must bend to hear it, "say that you love me—now."

"Now more than I have ever done," I answered, the tears falling fast upon my cheeks, and scalding grimy paths down the brine that crusted them, "but tell me, Vesta, my dear one; tell me that you forgive me for bringing you to this."

She answered me, her tones scarce audible.

"'Tis not your doing, husband—but if it were—I would—forgive——" and the sentence died away.

I held her still, watching the changing of her features, which told as well as words how the spark of life flickered slowly to its end.

"It will not be a long farewell, sweet one," I said, "for soon I shall follow you."

Presently her frame quivered, her lips opened, and her eyes sought mine beseechingly.

"What is it?" I asked, bending low.

"Water! water!" she gasped, with a great effort.

Despairingly I shook my head, and then she seemed to recollect the melancholy situation.

"Husband—love—" she said, faintly, slowly, brokenly, "farewell—farewell——" and the soul fled to its home in the Shadow-Land. Frantically I called her name, vainly I begged for but one other word, hoarsely I cried aloud for help in my solitude and distress, but the dead answered

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not, and the murmur of a cooling, vaporous eastern breeze that now sprang up only served to mock my misery.

Then I arose upon the raft with clenched hands and blazing eyes, and shaking my arms at the sky I cursed the spirits and the gods with all the energy that my frenzied tongue could use; I cursed them again and again, blaspheming horribly; I cursed all whom I had known—the false Briseis, the treacherous Sothi, the rebel Nubians, Itaska the wife of Asos, Sethos the plotter, and most of all the coward drunken crew whose act had brought things to this pass: long and fiercely I stood and raved, till my throat refused to utter the words that strove for speech, till the sweat stood in beads upon my body, till my head seemed in a whirl of fire, and I sank, exhausted, upon the raft, in a deathlike stupor.

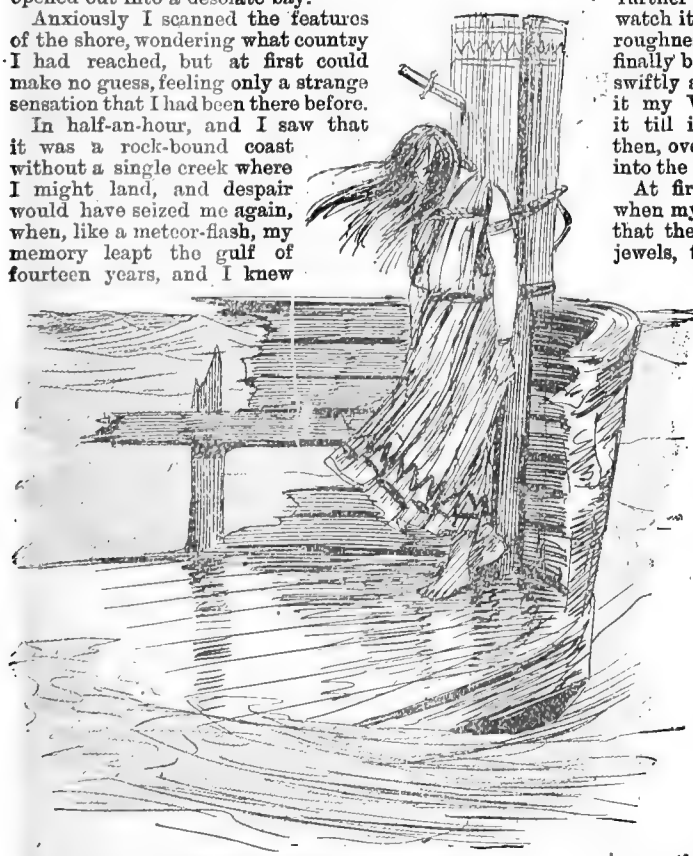
CHAPTER XII.

The Princess of Aidè.

I woke from the stupor to find the noonday sun blazing down upon me with maddening fierceness, and the dark outlines of a coast of some sort looming up out of the waters right ahead. Hope, which had left me, now returned, and looking not at *that* which lay on the raft beside me, I pulled with all my strength towards the land, which, as I neared, opened out into a desolate bay.

Anxiously I scanned the features of the shore, wondering what country I had reached, but at first could make no guess, feeling only a strange sensation that I had been there before.

In half-an-hour, and I saw that it was a rock-bound coast without a single creek where I might land, and despair would have seized me again, when, like a meteor-flash, my memory leapt the gulf of fourteen years, and I knew that I was in the solitary bay where the pirate's secret treasure cave was!



Vesta standing where I had bound her.

Well enough, then, I remembered those curving rocks, stretching out into the sea on either hand in sullen greyness, well I knew those frowning crags, and well recalled those rough-hewn stairs on the steep cliff-face! Here, after many years of wandering, I was cast up by the sea, finding, now I sought it not, the object of a fruitless quest.

Nearer and nearer drew the raft, and then I saw what made me rub my eyes and stare again with sheer amazement. The tide was just on the turn at that instant, and instead of merely washing the lowest step, as it had used when I knew it last, now covered the topmost stair but two, and I could reach the cave floor from the flat craft on which I stood!

Wondering, and for the moment forgetting all else in my curiosity, I pulled myself into the cool cavern and looked round. Truly, the sea had risen or the land sunk, for the two outstretching arms of that deserted bay were scarcely half their former length, and even when the tide was at its lowest ebb the waves must have dashed, not upon the narrow strip of sand that had once been there, but against the rugged stones above.

Glancing down I saw to my dismay that the raft, being unfastened, was slowly sheering off the rock and tossing perilously near the current, which, as of old, swept into and out of the bay in a mighty curve under the beetling crags.

I made a great effort to reach it with my foot, in vain! I let down a cord with hook attached, which I found in the cave, but by then the raft had veered round still further out of my grasp, and I was forced to stand and watch it drifting slowly away, now nearing some projecting roughness in the cliff, now recoiling with the shock, and finally being caught in the outgoing current and carried swiftly away into the vastness beyond my ken, bearing with it my Vesta, sleeping her last, long sleep. I watched it till it faded into the indistinguishable distance, and then, overcome by the pangs of thirst and hunger, turned into the cave.

At first I saw only the glitter of precious stones, but when my eyes grew accustomed to the dimness, I perceived that the wooden shelves, the earthern jars, the boxes of jewels, the bars of solid gold, the bales of costly drapery, were all there, undisturbed by aught save the hand of time, since I had last seen them.

Eagerly I searched the earthern jars for water, but found none, so was forced to grope my way to the inmost recesses of that gloomy retreat, to drink out of the slimy little pool in the lowest part where the rain that percolated through the rocky roof collected.

This I drank with infinite relish, thereafter making a scanty meal of such of the stored nuts as were not dried to dust, then falling into a long, sound sleep, to wake invigorated, refreshed, hopeful, and ready for whatever fortune the future might hold for me.

I was not at all concerned regarding my means of exit from the cave; it was only needful to dig a slanting tunnel upwards at the back, with some of the implements ready to my hand, for at one point, judging from the position of the cave and the trend of the cliff-top, the thickness of the roof could not be more than the height of a man.

There I attacked the rock when my strength had somewhat returned, and after a spell of arm-aching labour, dragged myself into the outer air through the narrow hole I made.

A single glance sufficed to show that the tunnel emerged upon a wind-swept, treeless plateau, covered with a kind of low-growing brush, thick upon the ground. Not a human dwelling was in sight, not a sign of human presence or existence was visible on that far-stretching waste, and I felt sure, now, of keeping the entrance to my treasure-hoard unknown.

I was rich now, with wealth untold, and the world was before me to enjoy my good fortune to its full extent.

"Away with bitter memories and sad reflections!" I cried aloud to the winds as I stood on that solitary plain. "Away

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with care and sorrow! I will press out the juice of this World-Grape and drink it with pleasure unalloyed!"

Then I crept back down the tunnel and prepared to set forth. I donned a military costume—one of many that were stowed snugly away in the recesses, finding it a perfect fit, from leathern helm and doublet to wooded sandals—girded on the sword "Sunderer," a keen, short dagger, and a stout sling with a pouch of leaden bullets, secreted about my attire as many of the jewels and coins as I could conveniently carry, and, taking a last glimpse of the heaving sea with a sigh of half regret, scrambled out of the cave, concealed the place of egress with some of the thick-growing shrubs, and turned my footsteps inland.

Dragged myself into the outer air.

A day's journey brought me to the verge of the uninhabited region, and at nightfall I stole past the first hamlet, picking my way well among the shadows of the broad-leaved cactus trees and helping myself to fruit as I went, for I did not wish it to be known from what direction I had come.

I held on my way northward, thus, for three days, and then, resolving to secrete myself no longer, stalked boldly into the next village, and sat down in the drinking room of the little house of rest, where weary travellers are refreshed at their own cost. The house seemed deserted when I entered, for no one came to attend my wants, not even when I called for food, and tapped the floor impatiently with my foot.

Enraged at this scurvy treatment, and hungry as a ravening wolf withal, I drew "Sunderer" from its sheath, and struck three thunderous, resounding blows with the flat of it upon the empty board.

At this, some slight stir was perceptible in the house, and presently a little, fat, greasy man with a scared face, came into the room, bowing and making a profusion of eloquent apologies, rubbing his rounded hands together the while in nervous excitement.

"Bring me a meal for three! and let it be a sumptuous one," I demanded, in a tone that struck terror to his weakling heart, showing him at the same time the colour of a gold piece to increase his alacrity. In a trice he was gone, putting the whole place into an uproar with his bustling and fidgeting haste. I smiled to myself as I sat back on the wooden bench, thinking that it must have been some time since the little man had seen the glint of a traveller's gold.

After a while, the viands not forthcoming, I set to work polishing the brightened parts of my "Sunderer's" sheath, rubbing the jewels with which it was inlaid till it sparkled like a shaft of light, and while thus occupied noticed the doorway darken, and a soldier, travel-worn, step in, taking a seat just opposite to mine.

"Greeting, comrade!" I said, looking up from my work.

"Greeting!" he answered, looking at me curiously.

I looked at him again; there was something peculiar about him that I could not define at first. Ah! I saw it now. *One ear was missing!*

"Vichri!" I cried. "By all the spirits!"

"And you are Arnon the Pirate, if I mistake not," said he, no less surprised.

"'Tis some time since we two met," I remarked, smiling grimly at the remembrance.

"Yes, much has happened in the meantime," he returned, leaning forward and speaking confidentially; "much that you had better know before you stir far in this stricken land."

"Pray tell me this needful and ill news," I asked, "for I would fain make a comrade of you, who are so worthy of my steel; that is, if you can pardon me for slicing off your ear. 'Twas done in the heat of strife."

"Freely," answered Vichri, to all appearance with sincerity, "freely. What do you first wish to know?"

"How fares it with your cousin Briseis, whose perfidy has exiled me these many years?"

"Exceedingly well," said he, with nevertheless a shade of hesitation in his tone; "exceedingly well as for herself, but badly as for the realm she rules and the people she governs."

"Governs!" I repeated, interrupting him. "Of what province is she the head, then?"

Vichri looked at me strangely. "Is it news to you," he asked in surprise, "that Dulo X. is dead, and that Queen Briseis reigns in his stead?"

It was news to me, to whom Atlantis and all its doings had been blank for a dozen years and more. "Yes," I replied, "but what has this to do with me?"

"Everything, methinks," said one-eared Vichri; "the story of your adventures and exploits as a pirate, of your escape from Miropis, of your love for the Princess Briseis, of your search for treasure, and subsequent capture and condemnation to the slave-galley, was in all men's mouths when I returned to Court a short time after the deed was done."

"Then you had no hand in my degradation?" I cried, starting forward, my fingers clutching "Sunderer's" hilt. "Swear it!"

He did so instantly. "I was no party to that despicable trick," he said, "nor wished to be." I sank back upon the bench. He went on: "But when my cousin took the throne, after Dulo died, by advice of the priests and at the cost of severe struggles with other claimants, she issued a proclamation of great harshness against all pirates and all who aided or sheltered them, particularly one Arnon, the son of Didron, otherwise known as Phrona, the Iron-fingered. A great reward was, and is still offered for your capture, alive or dead, if you set foot on the shores of Atlantis. You see now why I have warned you. It will be well if you take another name before showing yourself in or near any of the great cities."

"It will, indeed, be well," said I thoughtfully, "and for this service, Vichri, I am indebted to you."

My tardy host now brought in the repast for which I longed, and I fell to forthwith. My comrade seemed to have no appetite—a strange thing for a soldier on a journey—and so I had to demolish the victuals myself, which proved an easy task in my famished condition.

By the Athor! it was enough to make a sphinx smile to see the look of consternation on the face of the little innkeeper as dish after dish was emptied, and vessel after vessel was drained into my unsatiated interior!

At last, when the board was nearly as bare as when I first sat down, when his look of dismay had deepened into unutterable terror at my capacity, and Vichri himself was moved to ejaculations, I pushed the seat away, sitting awhile to rest.

"Now, tell me," I asked my one-eared comrade, when our host was gone, "how it is that the land is stricken, as you said."

"It is cursed alike by its own folly and by the hands of the spirits," he replied. "The first trouble has been stayed after much bloodshed, for the people in general have rallied round their Queen and her priests, enabling her to defeat

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all her enemies, but the spirits are still pressing hardly upon us. The sea has overflowed its coasts, and much of the land is now lost beneath its rising waves. So Briseis has but poor fortune with her kingdom."

Something of this I expected, remembering the height of the water in the bay where the cave was, but the thought of the continued hatred of the Queen, who had once thrown her arms about my neck in love's abandon, rendered me careless of other things than her incomprehensible inconstancy.

"And what is your counsel for myself?" I asked. He thought a moment, then said:

"If you want active service, I would ask you to come with me. I am on my way to take arms under Quitzaal, the governor of Ulmeca, our colony in the western land. He is on no friendly terms with the Queen; indeed, 'twould need little to set them at the sword-point, and so revive the flame of civil war." ("Surely," thought I, "Vicbri is on no very civil terms with his cousin.") "Either in that case, or against the Red Barbarians, I can promise you good work for your weapons."

I shook my head. "I shall not fight against the Queen," I answered, "come what may."

His face fell at this, but, recovering, he went on: "There is another chance, for you, then. The Princess of Aidè, of Thinæ, the province next to this to the north, is raising a regiment of soldiers to clear the hill country of the bands of robbers that infest it, and needs good officers for her force sadly. Methinks you would make her a right man. And if you say that I have sent you, your acceptance will be assured."

"Agreed!" I cried, longing once more to be a leader of men and drown my sadness in the stir of battle; "I will set out for Thinæ this very day."

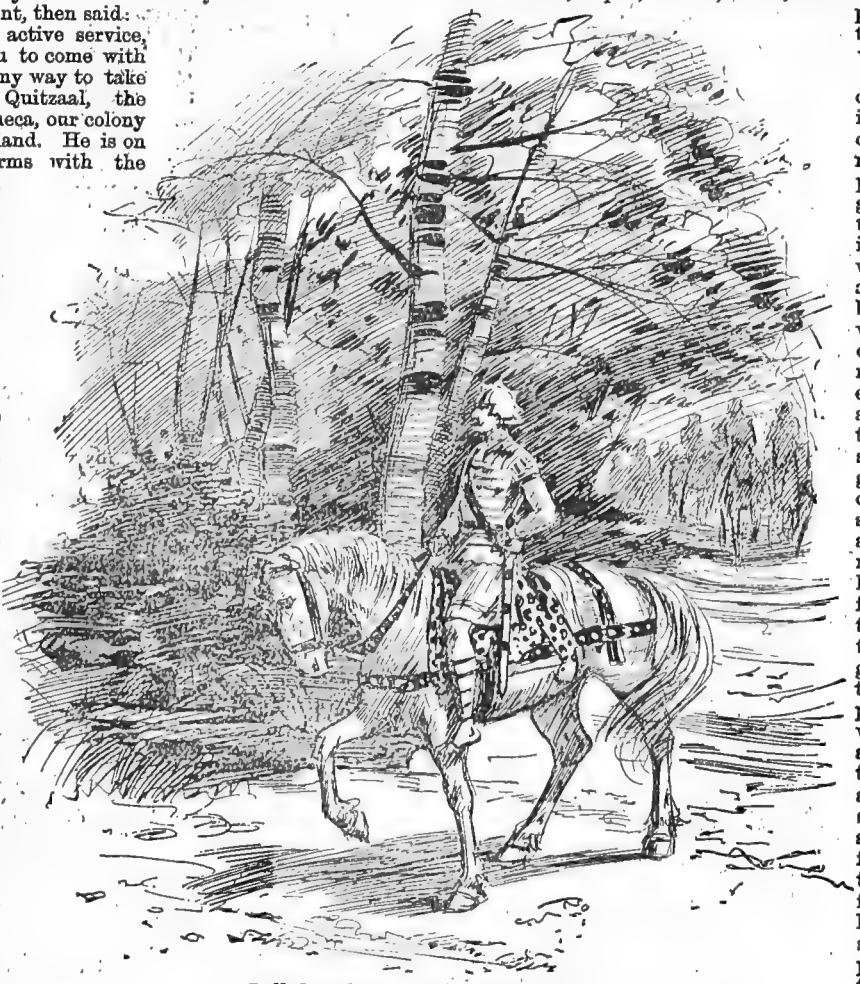
Awhile longer we talked, I skilfully eluding and baffling all his questions regarding my own vicissitudes, and drawing him out on all the great events that had taken place in my absence, and then, mightily refreshed, prepared to leave.

Throwing the innkeeper the gold coin I had shown him and a dozen more as well, which nearly took away the agitated little fellow's breath, and eyesight too, we left the house and journeyed a short distance together. At a place where the road forked my companion stopped.

"That is your way; this is mine," he said. "Farewell."

"Farewell!" I retorted, taken aback by his sudden curtness; "and if you value your remaining ear, take care you meet me not in battle, as is possible in these strange times."

"That is as it may be," he said shortly, and then we parted, going our separate ways. Little did I suspect, even then, the cool, calculating craftiness of his evil mind! You were tricked, duped, fooled; blind, witless Arnon, unsuspecting bungler that you always were!



Lulled me into deep engrossing thought.

Alone I wandered on, passing into the province of Aidè before nightfall, and putting up in great state at the first large inn I came to. I was rich now, and men bowed before me as I went, sparing no effort to make my quarters easy. I stopped at that inn across the border several days, gathering a band of followers, stout, well-armed, well-mounted, lusty knaves, ready to follow me through anything for the gold I offered them and the prowess I showed with the sword and sling. I then went on again, having secured a trusty steed, more confidently now, through that fair northern land, where the sun, more tempered than in the region I had left, shed ever a genial glow o'er hill and dale. Never before had I seen so fair a country.

It was, indeed, a lovely land that I now traversed, affording, as I went, gladsome glimpses and pleasing peeps of rural glades, mossy hollows, and ferny dingles, where the trees stood in lakes of a delicate blue, where the wild hyacinth tinged the ground.

Anon we journeyed by the banks of a swift-flowing river, now broadening out into a deep, pellucid pool, and now curling and foaming down a dainty rapid, white-sprayed, that seemed like an ivory circlet on the arm of a beautiful girl.

Then further on would be an old stone bridge over the gleaming current, with old huts and quaint gardens clustered near it, while around rose craggy heights, soaring

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to the sky, all symphonies in dark, dull grey, and darker green and dullish purple.

As we neared Thinæ, the chief town of the province of Aidè, the villages became more frequent, and the woodland recesses by contrast more delightful, more solitary, more soothing still.

Here I welcomed more earnestly than before the enchantment of the encompassing woods, the green, sunny slopes, the wilful little waterfalls, the hum and whirr of insect life, the songs of birds, the rich perfume of the many flowers, and the great masses of white, fragrant bloom that clothed the low trees. Still we followed the sparkling river, limpid and luminous as the eyes of a gazelle, mirroring on its pure surface frond of fern, branch of tree, and grass-like rush, and reflecting in its depths the subtle, silent changing of the clouds in the arch above.

Small wonder is it that my followers found me a dull leader, leaving them much to their own devices. I was in no mood to laugh and jest with them then, though I felt that after all it was good to live in that fair land.

The quiet grandeur of the sun's arising over those fertile hills, the aroma and solemnity of the wooded avenues through which we passed, the creeping on of the silent eve, the lengthening of the cool shadows, the unsurpassed restfulness of the day's departure, so much sweeter, purer, peace-giving, than the sudden fall of the tropic night—all lulled me into deep, engrossing thought and long, abstracted silences, at which my men marvelled.

Once I overheard the fragment of a conversation between the two whom I had appointed chiefs of the band under myself. It was when we were riding down a pleasant, winding path contiguous to the stream I have mentioned. Said the first:

"Our master seemeth wrapped in thought."

"And none too pleasant ones, methinks," said number two.

"What is't he's turning over in his mind? Canst guess, Valdo?" asked the first speaker.

"Wealth or women I'll warrant me," said the second, "and more likely the last than the first, for he pays with no niggard hand."

"An that be so," said the other, "I'll wager thee a hundred tecs that he is smitten with our flighty Princess, and little need for surprise at that, for she turns the heads of most men who come to her near presence."

"'Twere too risky a wager for me to take," laughed Valdo; "but if it be as thou say'st, I imagine she'll rouse him from his reverie when we get to her mimic Court. But whilst taking counsel, Atris, hast heard aught of Quitzaal's doings of late?"

"Not I," said Atris. "Though he is so still that one must needs expect some mischief to be hatching."

They fell back a few paces then, and I heard no more, though I had heard sufficient to set me thinking anew. I became curious to see this charming semi-sovereign, and test for myself whether her near presence was so captivating as report had it.

Since the two fair ones who had loved me truly were dead, since the only one I loved with a quenchless flame was false to me, since all whom I had known and trusted were lost or slain, and I stood alone in the world, why should I not seek what solace I could in the giddy whirl of a dissipated life, enjoying myself to the full, now that the wealth was ready to my hand?

The words that the Spirit of Isis had spoken came into my mind for a moment, only to be banished with a scornful laugh, for was it likely that I should ever mate with one who had put a price on my head?

And that being so, what temptation had power to harm me more? Away with such dream-fancies, sent only to mock and delude, and welcome a life of instant pleasure, where the wine flows round the board and bright eyes speak to bright eyes, telling of present love in every longing glance! Thus I thought, now that the weight of sorrow had broken down the barriers of rectitude, and thus I acted, and suffered in consequence, as you will see.

In due time we entered the city of Thinæ, and marching through its tree-lined streets with great pomp and intentive clangour, came to the palace of the Princess, a very dream-land of material splendour and obtrusive opulence.

Here I sent word by the seneschal of my coming, and that I offered myself as a soldier in the Princess's army. For a name I gave Macis, after the mate of the luckless *Seamew*, and by that name was known to my men. A bravely-decked functionary, with many bows and unnecessary speeches, informed me in answer that to-morrow the Princess herself would see the stranger who appeared so opportunely, and that meanwhile, myself and followers would be entertained in the palace as honoured guests.

The remainder of that day and the following morning I busied myself in learning all I could regarding my fair hostess, discovering, amongst other things, that her husband, the Prince of Aidè, was at that time on foreign service, being in the pay of Quitzaal, and had not seen his province for now ten years.

The Governor and his wife had quarrelled, it was reported, and were not likely to live together again; indeed, from the way men talked of the Princess over the confidential wine at night, there was small need for surprise thereat. But in my reckless mood I cared little for such circumstances.

I felt as though all stay and guide and hope in life were gone for me, and I drifted alone on the world's wide ocean, at the mercy of the first fierce passion-storm that should arise.

Towards nightfall, when the Princess had tired of the company of her last favourite, one Dison by name, a rich noble, proud alike of his descent and his martial prowess, she sent the seneschal to take me before her.

Already consumed with curiosity, I followed where the chattering old man led, through massive portals, down spacious corridors, up broad and easy stairways, in and out of gilded rooms thronged with gay assemblies, who regarded me with undisguised indifference, past dainty little alcoves and windows looking out on pillared balconies, till he stopped before a purple curtain drawn across a doorway.

"Here, my son," said he, "we shall find the Princess. Follow my footsteps as I enter, and if I may advise thee, I would say, do not ape humility in her presence. My mistress loves a self-assertive bearing above all things."

I thanked my guide for the timely hint, slipping a gold piece in his hand as a guerdon, and said: "Pass on!"

He pulled aside the heavy drapery and stepped in with wonderful agility for so old a man, I hard on his heels, agog with expectancy and surmise.

It was a sumptuous, ease-breathing, sense-lulling apartment where the Princess Listra received me; a room redolent of sweet perfume and merry with the warbling of scores of singing birds; a chamber that reflected the wealth, the voluptuousness, and the graceful tastiness of its fair mistress in every part.

Enchanting oriel windows gave glimpses of the spacious palace grounds, luxurious couches invited the weary guest to revel in their downy depths, choice and priceless trinkets, gathered from many lands, bedecked the walls and polished tables, and at the further end of the lofty chamber, behind the seat where the Princess sat, towered three marvellously-wrought marble figures, dwarfing to insignificance the dozen statuettes that ornamented the high carved niches in the wall.

The outer figures of the three were presentments of the spirits of Life and Truth, the middle one, larger than they, and presumably the spirit most worshipped there, was the image of the Spirit of Love, not over-chaste in its design, nor sparing of detail in the exquisite execution of its finely-chiselled lines.

But chief among the many beauteous things within that

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room, more lovely, more fascinating, more enthralling than them all, was the Princess Listra herself, as reclining indolently on a couch of ivory, inlaid with gold, she waved her dainty hand to her maids, bidding them leave her presence while she talked with the stranger. The old seneschal, also, having discharged his duty, withdrew, leaving me alone with his mistress.

"And thou wouldst be an officer in my army, stranger?" she said, when I explained my wishes.

"For that, as I have told thee, I came," said I, "but now I would sooner be thy slave than go away untaken."

"Brave words!" cried the Princess, though not displeased, "such as I have heard too oft to value greatly. What canst do if I make you my general?"

"Anything thou mayst wish me to," I answered boldly, "for at sword-play, or slinging, or archery, or even bare-handed, I'll warrant I excel any soldier within thy province."

"Art not blind to thy own merits, Macis!" said the languishing beauty, with a bright eyeflash that betokened arising interest. "Thinkest thou can overcome any whom I put against thee in the palace yard to-morrow noon?"

"Aye, or any two!" I replied, carried away by a consuming desire to exhibit my strength before this lovely being's gaze, "or any three for a kindly gleam from she under whom I shall soon serve!"

"An thy arms are brawny as thy speech is honeyed, I doubt it not!" said Listra, passing her fingers across her forehead as if to shade her eyes, but really to take a peep at me unnoticed, exposing, in the action, a white rounded arm, the picture of perfect health, beneath the purple robe that fell around her in its rich and ample folds, and which was gathered in upon her breast and fastened upon her creamy throat by a clasp of purest gold.

"Nor needst thou doubt it," responded I, bewildered by her sensuous beauty and bewitching grace. "I only long for to-morrow's sun to prove my words true before all thy guests and servants. If I succeed thou wilt accept my services; if I fail, thou canst send me away as a weakling—a craven. But I think Vichri would tell thee, were he here, that I am not the last, for 'twas he sent me to thee."

"I would sooner be thy slave than go away untaken."

"Then this trial I proposed in jest need not be held," said the Princess, "for Vichri is a brave soldier and knows a strong arm when he sees one. Rest content, Macis, thou art appointed, and when thy men are ready root me out these lawless robbers that infest our northern hills."

"That I will, and glad to do the work set by so fair a taskmistress," I answered. This time she did not reject the flattery, but replied with mock severity:

"Do so, then, and mind thou seekest not my presence till the country roads are safe. Then I will think what reward will best suit so useful a soldier."

A while longer we talked, of the mysterious encroachment of the sea amongst other things, and then the Princess dismissed me, having by that time set my blood aflame with the witchery of her alluring loveliness.

(To be continued.)

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A NIGHT ADVENTURE IN BENARES.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

HAD I known what was going to befall me when I took steamer passage from Ceylon to India I should have probably continued my journey eastward round the world without stopping at the "Land of the Rajahs." In blissful ignorance, however, I landed at Calcutta. The time of year was that when the climate most favours up-country travelling, and so, after a brief visit to friends, I started north by rail. I was the richer by half-a-dozen introductory letters to men of more or less prominence in the chief cities of the empire.

I went first to Benares—the sacred city on the mighty Ganges—and sought the house of Sita Ram, to whom one of my letters was addressed. Sita Ram was a wealthy and cultured Hindoo banker, and my friends had pictured in glowing colours the hospitality that I would receive.

Before my ride through the city was over I felt that hospitality of any sort from anyone would be doubly welcome. To my surprise, most of the bazaars and business places were closed, though it was nearly afternoon. Groups of evil-faced natives stood about in the squares and the streets, while police and soldiers appeared to be unusually plentiful. I was made a target for sullen glances from all sides, and I could not help recalling the stirring times of the great Mutiny, more than thirty years back.

I found Sita Ram's house to be a palatial cream-coloured building, not far from the river. Its owner proved to be absent, but his private secretary received me and opened the letter of introduction.

Baboo Das was a sleek, mahogany-faced gentleman who spoke English perfectly, and wore garments of faultless cut.

"My honoured master is in Allahabad on a matter of business," he explained. "He will return in a day or two, and meanwhile the house and servants are at your disposal."

I thanked Baboo Das, and inquired the meaning of the strange sights I had witnessed in the city.

"There has been danger of a riot during the last twenty-four hours," he replied gravely; "but it is believed to be past now. The most ignorant of the Hindoo population are angry because the municipality have acquired the Ramjee temple for the purpose of erecting new water-works on its site. The Mohammedans have taken part in the disturbance because of the dearness of provisions, for which the municipality is also responsible. My honoured master belongs to the board of government and helped to purchase the temple."

I suspected that Sita Ram's departure might be more in the order of a flight than of a business trip.

"Are you sure that the danger is over?" I asked, for I had some notion of going to a hotel.

"Yes," replied Baboo Das; "the rioters are cowed and submissive. My master's house was under the protection of the police, but they withdrew this morning."

His manner was so calm and decided that I quite forgot my fears. I was shown a luxurious bed-chamber, and a little later I dined in solitude off dishes of gold and silver. The entire house was furnished in a costly and sumptuous style that showed its bachelor owner to possess a sense of European taste as well as of barbaric splendour.

During the evening I was left pretty much to myself, and as I did not care to venture into the street I passed the time with a cigar and a magazine, and when I signified my wish to retire Baboo Das preceded me upstairs.

Squatted on a rug in the hall, just outside my room, was a bright-faced Hindoo lad, about twelve years old. A cord dangled by his side, and, passing through the door, communicated with the fans that were attached to the ceiling of the apartment. The lad was evidently the "punky wallah," or fan puller. His name was Gunpat, Baboo Das informed me, and his duty was to keep me cool during the sultry hours of the night.

I chatted with the boy for a few moments, and found him to be intelligent and fairly conversant with English. Then I entered my room and lowered the square of rice matting that was furled above the doorway. There was also a door of heavy teak-wood, but I did not think it necessary to close it. The apartment had two windows overlooking a small court-yard that contained shrubs and a fountain. After riding most of the day in a stuffy and jolting railway carriage I was weary. It did not take me long to undress and fall asleep. The last thing I remember was the soft whirling of the fans and their refreshing current of air.

I was awakened by a hand tugging at the bed-clothes. "Rouse, Sahib, there is danger," was poured into my ears by a shrill, childish voice.

I sprang out of bed in a trice and struck a light. It revealed the half-naked figure of little Gunpat. His expression was one of indignation, rather than of terror.

"What is it?" I demanded.

"Those pigs of rioters, Sahib," he replied. "They have broken loose at last."

Then, for the first time, I became aware of the tumult in the streets surrounding the house. Brawling voices and the restless patter of feet rose hoarsely on the night air. I could distinguish the shrill "Din! Din!" of the Mohammedans—their rallying cry to battle. From afar I heard the faint pealing of bells and the rattle of musketry. A lively commotion was going on downstairs, banging of doors, and shoving of furniture, interlarded with husky voices.

Gunpat slipped away for a moment and I hurried on my shirt and trousers. I felt decidedly uncomfortable, to say the least. I could not forget the black looks that had greeted me on the previous afternoon. Europeans were in bad odour at Benares just then. I glanced at the clock. The hands pointed to an hour past midnight. I began to consider what I had better do. I was puzzled to account for the non-appearance of Baboo Das.

Meanwhile the tumult had swelled to a frightful din. The streets without seemed to be choked with rioters. "Kill Sita Ram!" they yelled. "Slay the heretic! Loot his house. Down with the destroyers of the faith!"

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I was fully alive to the situation now, and the thought of my peril sickened me. A moment later a succession of heavy thuds, followed by a tremendous crash and a burst of cheers, told that the main entrance of the house had been beaten in. Cries of rage and terror and the sounds of deadly conflict floated up the staircase.

I determined to escape, if such a thing were possible. There was no time to put on shoes or coat. I seized my money and papers, and jammed them into the pockets of my trousers.

I ran to the window and looked out. Alas! The court-yard swarmed with dusky figures. The only avenue of escape was cut off.

I turned back into the room, resolved to sell my life dearly. I had no weapons, but on the wall hung a Tibetan shield and spear, trimmed with yaks' tails. I dragged them down and rushed for the door. Before I could close it entirely, a figure slipped through the crack, and I very nearly impaled Gunpat on the spear.

"The Sahib must fight," he exclaimed. "Baboo Das has fled, and the rioters are downstairs and everywhere. They have killed some of the servants, and now they will search for my master, whom they hate. They believe he is in the house. They will kill you, too, Sahib, if they find you."

"What shall we do?" I demanded. "Is there a way to escape?"

"None, Sahib. We must push furniture against the door and fight. The police and the soldiers will be here presently."

"But surely the mob won't hurt a little chap like you?" I replied, filled with admiration at the lad's bravery. "Go while you can, Gunpat."

"No," he answered calmly; "my duty is with the Sahib. I will stay here."

There was no time to argue, for already the blood-thirsty miscreants were pattering up the staircase with shouts and yells. The door had only a frail bolt on the inside, but luckily the furniture was massive. Gunpat seemed to know just what was wanted. He helped me to the best of his strength, and hardly was the barricade in place when the mob surged through the hall.

"The heretic is trapped," they cried, at sight of the closed door. "Come out, Sita Ram, and meet your fate."

Crash! crash! crash! The door trembled under the rain of heavy blows. A table that was on the summit of the barricade toppled to the floor, and burst asunder. The mob heard the fall, and yelled exultantly.

Gunpat twirled his spear between his supple fingers. "The end will be soon, Sahib," he said quite calmly. The next instant he gave an eager cry and pointed overhead. There I saw for the first time a small circular trap-door.

"Where does it lead?" I demanded.

"To the roof," replied Gunpat. "My master sits there on hot evenings. But there is no ladder. We must take from the barricade, Sahib."

No sooner said than done. Hardly as they could be spared we removed a table, a chest of drawers, and two chairs. We piled them one upon another. I plainly saw the door quiver from top to bottom as I mounted the shaky structure. I was directly below the trap now, and a blow from my fist drove it upward. I grasped the edge of the opening and drew myself to the roof. Gunpat passed up the two spears and the shield. Then I caught the lad's hands and drew him to my side.

That instant the mob broke into the room below, where they expected to find Sita Ram. They howled with rage at the empty room. Then we saw their dark faces glaring at the pile in the middle of the room, and up at the opening in the ceiling above. We slammed down the trap door but there was no way to fasten it on the outside.

We knew the mob would follow us in a moment, so we ran across the flat roof, mounted the parapet, and sprang to the top of an adjoining house. Thus we hurried on from roof to roof till we were some distance from the house of Sita Ram.

"Faster, Sahib! they are coming!" panted Gunpat.

Then husky yells rang out behind us and I turned and saw half a score of turbaned figures at our very heels. The space of but a single roof intervened. A spear whizzed between us. A pistol ball shrieked overhead.

Faster and faster we sped, till suddenly a gap six feet wide yawned before us. "Jump, Sahib," yelled Gunpat. Without hesitation we sprang together, and landed safely on the next roof. One of our pursuers was close behind—a burly Mohammedan with a sword. Gunpat snatched the brazen shield from my hand; turned, and threw it with all his might. It struck the fellow as he was in the act of jumping. Without a cry, he plunged down between the houses. His companions paused only an instant. Then they leaped the gap, and came on with frightful yells.

This advantage, brief as it was, proved our salvation. We ran on as before, climbing headlong over the parapets from roof to roof, neither gaining or losing. The end house of the block abutted on the Ganges, and all at once, over the last parapet, we saw the water below us.

"You can swim, Sahib?" asked Gunpat.

"Yes, come on," I replied.

We dropped through twenty feet of air and shot far under water. When we came to the surface we dived again instantly. The next time we rose we were well out in the current. Side by side we swam out, while a shower of spears fell harmlessly in our wake.

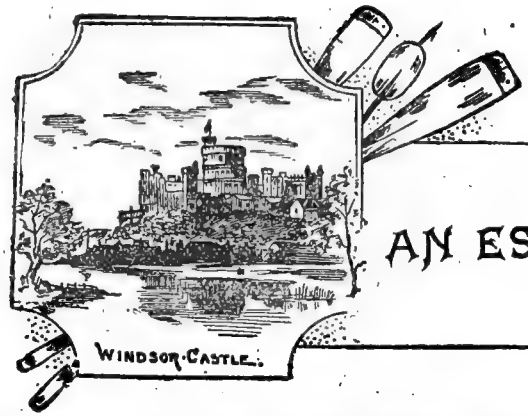
Anchored in mid-stream, we spied the ark-shaped roof of a trader's boat, and a short swim brought us to it. The friendly natives gave us a shelter, and there we remained until morning, listening to the sounds of strife in the city.

When day broke the riot was quelled, but the mob had wrecked the telegraph office and railway station, plundered the treasury, and destroyed the engine and boiler of the new water-works.

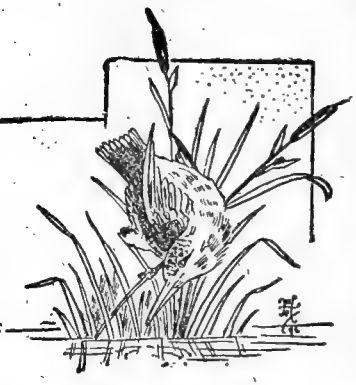
Sita Ram returned that afternoon, and I found him a most polished and agreeable gentleman. He was apparently unconcerned over the looting of his house. His first act was to discharge Baboo Das. His next, after hearing my story, was to promote brave little Gunpat to an honoured position among the household servants. Nor did I forget to honour the lad in my own way.

HARRY ROGERS.

The November number of PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, as well as that of MELODY, is Now on Sale.



AN ESCAPADE.



In days gone by it was the custom in France for those daughters of noble families who could not find a husband to enter a convent. That many took the veil very much against their will goes without saying, but obedience to parents was imperative.

In 1787 there was a large number of these poor birds caged in the great convent of Arles, the antique royal abbey of St. Cesaire; but the youngest and prettiest of them all was undoubtedly Sister Rose.

Rose de X—— belonged to a family that was a great deal richer in ancestors than hard cash. When her father had bled himself dry to purchase a commission for his eldest son in the Bussy Regiment, there remained to him not a sou wherewith to *dot* his daughter. He therefore decided that she should become a nun.

In the opinion of the parents it was far better for their daughters to pass their lives under the veil in some rich convent than to espouse a penniless noble. Rose probably failed to take this wise view of the matter, but the parental fiat had gone forth; it only remained for her to obey. Therefore, sad at heart, and with her pretty eyes brimming over with tears, she entered the convent. The Archbishop gave her the veil, and all the nobility of Provence assisted at her investiture.

Being young and of a cheerful disposition, she soon accommodated herself to her forced seclusion, and no doubt would ere long have become reconciled to the extremely easy existence enjoyed by the inmates of the convent, had not her unlucky star placed in her way a dashing chevalier, who turned her head. This chevalier was the brother of Rose's particular friend, a nun like herself, and they first saw each other one visiting day in the reception room with the result that the chevalier promptly fell head over ears in love.

The chevalier was a hot-headed youth of twenty, full of ardour and daring. He determined to make his passion known to the pretty nun. This was easily accomplished by means of a *billet doux*, a complaisant gardener, and a piece of gold. Had Rose done her duty she would have refused the missive with indignation, or have thrown it in the fire without reading it. But she was young, she was curious—and maybe she was in love. She was weak enough to take the fatal note, to read it, and, for ought I know, answer it.

However this may be, on the night of Shrove Tuesday, when all the convent had retired to rest, Rose issued barefooted and on tip-toe from her cell, and flew like a frightened bird to the end of the garden. She was probably not overcome by surprise to find there a gallant chevalier, who threw his mantle around her and in a trice whisked her up a ladder—and over the garden wall.

An hour later the chevalier appeared at the masked ball in progress at the Jeu de Paume, and clinging to his arm was the prettiest and timidest domino that ever was seen.

When Rose found herself amid the gay throng of maskers, she was so frightened she could not put one foot before the other. She thought she was in the infernal regions. But the chevalier held her so tenderly, and breathed nothings so softly into her little ears, that she soon became reassured, and thought she was in paradise.

They danced together, and everybody admired them. They were, in fact, too much admired, for a presumptuous officer—somewhat heated by wine, which maketh glad the heart of man, and likewise maketh him quarrelsome, according to his temperament and the quantity he imbibeth—also wanted to dance with the pretty domino. But the chevalier failed to see the fun of it. Facetious compliments were exchanged, and in two shakes of a lamb's tail two swords were flashing from their scabbards, and probing for the soft spots in the respective anatomies of the rivals, while the whole ball was in an uproar.

Rose, left by her chevalier, and wild with terror, flitted out of the ballroom into the dark labyrinth of streets like a will-o'-the-wisp, without anybody taking any notice of her.

When she began to recognise her surroundings, she found herself in the narrow Rue des Petres, opposite the porch of the cloister of Saint Trophime. Just then two o'clock struck in the town hall tower. Half dead with fright at finding herself alone in the streets at that hour, she sat down on the steps of the cloister, and wept until her heart was like to break.

What was to be come of her? Return home to her father? She trembled at the mere thought: he would probably kill her should she dare to show her face before him! Return to the convent? Absolutely out of the question!

While she was lamenting her terrible plight the bell of the Carmelites du Marche Neuf began to ring matins. Its clear sonorous clang summoning the nuns to the chapel recalled the convent to her mind. What excitement there would be at five o'clock, when the sisters rose and discovered her absence! How she envied them now, peacefully reposing in their white cells! What would she not have given to be in their place! What she had suffered for having listened to the temptation of the Evil One!

In her anguish her thoughts dwelt upon the great saints whose relics in the shrine near Arles perform so

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many miracles. She knelt upon the hard, cold stones and prayed to them with all her heart to save her. And the great saints, always full of compassion for us poor mortals, sent her a happy inspiration.

Mgr. du Lau, the Archbishop of Arles, was the kindest of men, and when he visited the convent, he always advised and encouraged her. Why not go to him? He alone had the power to save her.

A few minutes later she was pulling the bell at the door of the Archbishop's palace. She had to ring for a long time, for the porter was not accustomed to be called up at such an hour, and when at length he opened the door, he would not push his condescension to the point of admitting a lady who declined to give her name. But the pretty unknown pleaded so earnestly and persuasively that he at last relented and grumblingly went upstairs to wake his Lordship the Archbishop.

The good prelate did not make so much fuss about it. When he learned that a lady wished to see him on serious and urgent business, he had her shown up to the waiting-room without more ado.

Rose awaited him in fear and trembling, and when he made his appearance she pulled her hood over her face and fell at his feet. The holy man was considerably surprised to recognise in the mysterious supplicant a nun whom he believed to be safely confined in her convent, and even more so when the girl he had always regarded as a model of saintliness confessed her awful fault.

At first he had a good mind to shake her, but seeing her in tears he could not help pitying the poor lamb who had wandered from the fold and appealed to him, the good shepherd, to lead her back again; so, placing his hand on her head, he said:

"My daughter, your fault is great. However, swear to me that you will never again listen to the counsels of the devil, and that you will henceforward be the example of piety you ought to be, and I will see what can be done."

Rose promised fervently all that was required of her.

"'Tis well!" exclaimed his Lordship, raising her to her feet. "Courage! Cover up your face so that no one can recognise you. In one hour from this you will be back in your cell, and you can believe me when I say that no one in the convent will ever know you left it."

This said, his lordship summoned his valet and ordered that his carriage be got ready without delay. A few minutes later the last of the revellers from the masked ball at the Jeu de Paume were surprised to meet the Archbishop's carriage rumbling along towards the convent. What would they have said could they have seen, ensconced in a corner of the old coach, the pretty domino who had excited their curiosity?

The sister who acted as doorkeeper of the convent, awakened by the noise of the wheels as the carriage drew up at the gate, popped her head out of the window of her turret and thought she was dreaming when she beheld his Grace the Archbishop.

His Lordship ordered her to open the gate. She hastened to comply and to call the Abbess, whom he wished to see immediately. The Abbess jumped out of bed and hurriedly donned her robe, putting her veil on all awry in her precipitation, and forgetting her golden crucifix.

The Archbishop was waiting for her in the reception-room.

"Madame," he exclaimed sternly, as she entered, "it appears that scandalous things are taking place in your convent. I am told that some of your nuns gad about the street at night."

"Oh! Monsignor, it is impossible!" ejaculated the Abbess, clasping her hands and raising her eyes in horror.

"A truce to talking," continued the Archbishop. "I am here to see for myself, as is my duty, whether all is in order. Let every nun lock herself in her cell, and you, madame, set the example by withdrawing to your apartment. I will go the round of the cloisters and see whether everybody responds to the roll call."

As the Archbishop ordered, so was it done. Every nun, from the Abbess to the doorkeeper, locked herself in her cell. His Lordship then fetched Rose, who was huddling in the carriage, and led her through the deserted corridors to her cell, where she noiselessly locked herself in. Then the Archbishop went the round of the convent, knocking at every door.

"*Benedicamus domina!*"

And every nun responded:

"*Deo gratias!*"

Monsignor finished with the Abbess, whom he wished to assure that no one was missing. Then, filled with glee at the success of his pious manœuvre, he re-entered his carriage and returned to his palace.

From that day Rose was the model member of the community, and practised mortifications, vigils, and orisons to such an extent that she fell into a decline and died.

No one knew for certain what became of the chevalier. He had unfortunately killed his adversary, and had had to fly from the law.

Some declare that he became a monk. Others assert that he was taken at Quiberon, and that when the Republicans shot him he was found to be wearing as a sash across his breast the white veil of a nun. Anyhow, he was never seen at Arles again.

As to Mgr. du Lau, everybody knows that he was killed by a mob in 1792.

HONOR LUCELLE.

Jumbled Story Competition.—19.

ON page 604 appears a story, each line of which is numbered. The lines are all in their wrong position, and the prizes mentioned below are offered to those who write on a sheet of paper the numbers of the lines in the order most nearly correct. The title is jumbled up, and should be correctly given *and pasted on the paper containing the effort.*

The conditions are jumbled in the following paragraph as an example. The correct order of the lines is given in line 10.

1 SHORT STORIES on or before *Monday,*
2 awarded to the readers whose solutions first
3 *JUMBLED STORY.*
4 Four Prizes—one of £5 and three of £1 each—are
5 *November 9th,* and envelopes must be marked
6 correct. In the event of a tie, the prizes will be
7 reach this office.
8 All attempts to be delivered at the offices of
9 offered to the readers whose keys are most nearly
10 4—9—6—2—7—8—1—5—3—12—11—13—10.
11 a sheet of paper the figures in the order they
12 Competitors in doing the story should write on
13 believe to be correct, thus:

£2 is offered to the first of the readers living in Ireland who succeeds in forwarding the correct, or most nearly correct, solution.

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JUMBLED STORY No. 19.] [SEE PAGE 603.

AH, FRIEND CADI, WE AWAIT.

Kitty was arranging her skirts.
It was the most delicious moment of my life.
As I came up the drive, I saw this sight: Kitty, yonder is standing up dressed all in white. A man bent down, and kissed her on the cheek.
"Don't," I said, "you will kill yourself," and you are not going to marry"—I took a step nearer—because of what old Martha said to you? It is," I Count, who's not worthy——"
"Harry—dear." Her cheeks were covered with Martha's cottage.
The words took terrible effect. Kitty rose to her conversation concerns no one.
I crept round behind Kitty and behind the Count, and said very sternly: "Downright wicked, I repeat. The Count, in irreproachable knickerbockers, was insignificant little whippersnapper of an Italian subject.
Then I was no longer silent.
But she was too quick for me, and head in air, standing behind. I have often thought, in after life, my coat-tails, and thoroughly considered the lap.
"Don't breathe," I hissed, "or I'll murder you."
The words, I own, were strong ones; they had, interrupted her:
"Henry, how dare you."
I then gave her the minutest instructions, sprang into the saddle, and we sped away.
Then I took my bat, and struck out across the the Count's mouth, and with the other gripped his his brothers yonder."
The road outside the gates runs for two miles back her head.
"Are you ready?" asked Kitty.
Then I sprang back and pedalled furiously.
Kitty threw her feet on the foot-rests, and tossed stealthily, until my face was level with hers; then I wanted, "I see a great church, and my lady expression changed—"fair, a soldier, ah! and see that what I now did was the most successful action down a steep hill. We started at a great pace.
"Kitty," I said presently, as we sped madly down among the villagers as a fortune-teller. As a witch unwieldly man-killer" (I am a soldier) "you are old witch has looked at your hand, and said that fortune told again.
"I will," cried Kitty furiously, "and we will soon giving him a final admonition to keep silence, I feet her eyes flashed, her hands clenched together.
"It is absolutely preposterous."
"It isn't," she replied lamely, hastily rearranging her position on the front seat of a tandem bicycle. I ever accomplished.
I stooped forward on my handles, far forward, pedalled harder than ever.
I slackened speed, and silently we rode round to where the old witch had taken up her residence.
"When you have learnt manners," she said, "I very carefully, very stealthily, so that neither of see whom I am destined to marry."
Kitty put her tea-cup down with a bang.
The witch was standing over a cauldron, and two Italians were grinding a barrel-organ.
This shrivelled-up little woman, Martha, as she was called, had built up a reputation for herself marched to the door.
I emptied out my pockets into the old hag's arm in an iron grip.
"I see," she said, when we had told her what we in the neatest of cycling costumes, was taking up her hand, "it will be a man you have known ever known since you were a baby in arms, for an absurd, but it is downright wicked."
"Yes," said I, imitating the Count's voice, while peering into the contents.
"Martha," I said, as I pushed open her door, "I will speak to you again. In the meanwhile," went on, without allowing her time to answer. told."
"And if you do it satisfactorily, there's gold for once, you horrid wretch! Stop! I shall jump the power of making a scathing answer.
"Oh!" screamed Kitty, "how dare you! Stop at turning at the door, "you may digest this: "Well, this is the condition on which I shall stop; You go and throw me up, *me* whom you have very much mistaken," and with that she left me.
It was a pretty trick!
"Henry, how dare you!" she began, but I am going to bring a lady to have her fortune off!"
I did not answer.
"Henry," she repeated.
I pedalled in silence.
"Henry," said Kitty presently, when we found that you come with me to the witch, and have your blushes. "Before, you know, I was only in fun. Of you—pots of it."
I spread myself out before the fire, turned up fields (we were staying in the country) to the house since you were a baby."
And I maintain that the remainder of our course, Harry, I never really cared for the Count."
I was quick to follow up my advantage.
I paused for a suitable comparison. Outside homewards.
"It is not only preposterous," said I, "and however, this good effect; they deprived Kitty of them heard me, and then I clapped one hand over and leaving her to digest them, proceeded ourselves riding away.
I rose to my feet, threw out my chest, frowned, the hill, "why won't you love me? Is it merely here," she cried, taking Kitty's little pink palm in the tea-cups.
"And for why? Merely because a shrivelled up "not going to marry, Kitty, the man you love."
"Who's not worthy so much as to act monkey to at me—"a tall man," went on Martha—Kitty's is holding her hand"—Kitty threw a defiant glance if you imagine I have any care for a great, she was held in respect by everyone; even Kitty, as has been seen, was under her spell.

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By George Manville Fenn.

CHAPTER XLI.

Murray Speaks Truth.

"Brompton."

She had not read the word, but she divined it, and with a pitiful moaning cry, as all that awful past came back. He was ill there then. Was she to go and humble herself once again?

"Oh—oh—oh—oh!" that one continued moan, so full of misery and despair, as she covered her pain-distorted face with her hands, and sank back in her chair.

"Olive! For God's sake don't—don't!" he cried wildly. "You know how I have fought all that down. I cannot bear to see you suffer like this. It is too much. In Heaven's name, send me away!"

But she did not seem to hear his words, and the low, piteous moan went on, as, in spite of self, Murray took a step nearer to her, drawn by a power he could not for the moment master.

He took her hands in his, and drew them from her face, and she lifted her eyes to his with such a look of appeal and despair that, drawing his breath with a sob, he bent down, and kissed her fingers tenderly. That look had disarmed him.

"For Heaven's sake, control yourself!" he cried huskily. "Be a woman. You must not go there again. I'll go to him at once and you shall hear everything."

"I beg your pardon! I did not know you were engaged. One of your headaches, Olive?"

Lady Braetoun started from her seat and Murray turned fiercely upon him, white as ashes.

Braetoun, who also looked very white, had come in silently. The cab-wheels had made no sound, and he had let himself in with his latch-key.

"Roderick!" cried Olive, rushing to him to throw herself in his arms.

"Don't be a fool!" he said hoarsely. "Go to your room."

"But the telegram! We thought you were dangerously ill."

"So I am," he said, "or I shouldn't have sent. Enough to make me. He didn't lose any time. There, go!"

"No," she said firmly. "You are ill, and I must stay."

"What for?" he cried with a ghastly smile. "Are you afraid?"

"Yes, horribly! Roderick, dear, let me stay."

"You need not be alarmed, Lady Braetoun," said Murray quietly. "Perhaps it would be as well if you went to your room for a while."

She gazed at him with her eyes dilating, and in his read nothing but pity and a something which seemed to enforce obedience, as he went to the door and opened it for her to pass out, shivering with a horrible dread.

Murray stood looking after her till she had passed out of sight, and then closed the door and turned to cross to where Braetoun had thrown himself upon a couch, groaning with pain.

"I'm sorry I interrupted you," he said, with a ghastly, cynical grin.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Oh, curse this pain! You didn't lose a chance of finding me out."

"Out? I came expecting to find you here. Brute! Cowardly, callous brute, to insult your wife like that."

"Insult her! Ha-ha-ha!"

"By sending a telegram from the house of your mistress.

"Who did?"

"You. There is the post-mark on it—Brompton."

"How was she to know?"

"I came on at once, expecting to see you prostrate here, and, not finding you, of course she read the telegram with me."

"Well, what of it? She knows."

"Knows!" said Murray bitterly. "Yes; she knows."

"Ah," cried Braetoun, as he ground his teeth and writhed in his agony, "and what if she does? What does it matter to me? Curse her white face and sickening ways. She knows how to comfort herself with her handsome doctor."

"You villain!" cried Murray, bending over him, and catching him by the throat. "Dare to insult her again like that and I'll crush out your miserable life."

"You dare not," sneered Braetoun. "Bah! do you think I am blind?" and, struggling against the bodily agony he felt, he went on. "I've known it from the first. Hasn't it driven me away from home to get what consolation I could yonder? Villain, am I? Allan Murray, dear companion of my boyhood, when did you find me a fool?"

"Always. Never greater than you are now. Coward, too, idiot!"

"What! When I came back here, half dying, to find you two like that!"

"To find her broken-hearted, half fainting in her anxiety for you."

"Bah! Be honest. I am. Villain yourself!"

"Silence, sir. You married an angel of truth. You have done everything man could do to kill her love, but her heart has never beaten with a throb that was not for you."

"It's a lie. Always for you—the doctor—the clever, thoughtful doctor. I'm not a fool, I tell you. Do you dare to tell me here, face to face, that you have not loved her from the first?"

"There is no dare," said Murray, gazing down at the miserable, writhing being on the couch. "I do tell you, her husband, that I have loved her from the first day we met—before you ever set eyes upon her, and came like a blight

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—miserable, despicable creature that you are—to blast her young life."

"And what about you?" said Braetoun, whose face was more ghastly now.

"I am a man, a weak, helpless man, Roderick Braetoun, who has gone through so cruel a fire that I pray God it may fall to the lot of few. These things are beyond me. I cannot grasp why they should be so—how it should have fallen to one who loved Olive Emsworth to pass hours of misery, toil, and despair, to fight for the life of the man who robbed me of my love, to give him the power to keep on cursing her with his presence here."

"Go on—go on!" groaned Braetoun; and then mockingly: "You have both consoled yourselves pretty well!"

"Don't tempt me," cried Murray fiercely. "There are limits to what I can bear. You shall not insult her by your vile charges."

"Go on! You'll never make me believe."

"Then," said Murray, "you had better die."

"No: you daren't kill me, Murray," sneered Braetoun. "You daren't do that."

"No. But I tell you this: if ever poor mortal wretch was tempted by the devil to end a brother's life, I have been that man."

"I know. A few drops more. But there would be the inquest, and the fashionable physician hounded down, and the scaffold. No; you dared not do that, Murray, and you took your revenge another way."

"Repeat that foul, lying charge, and I leave you to your fate," cried Murray, with so fierce a look that Braetoun quailed. "Are you in a position to die? Better you should, and let her suffer and mourn for you, her wretched husband, than have you live to curse her still. You fool! To cast away from you happiness such as might have been yours. Love me! Why, she would not tolerate my presence if it were not for your sake. She knows what you know, that your chances of life would be *nil* in another's hands. It is no empty boast—only from the experience I have had of you. What! poison you? The end would come more surely—would have come a dozen times if I had stayed away—would come now if I go, and you know it."

"Yes, I know it, curse you!" groaned Braetoun. "But you've got to save me again, and you will. I'm not afraid, only of this cursed pain!"

"Yes," said Murray, "I have to save you again for her sake, if my poor knowledge will help me."

"Yes, and——"

"Stop!" said Murray fiercely. "I can bear no more, either now or in the future. Let this be the last time you ever send to me for help. Some other doctor m y grasp your case. You have now broken the last link. I can do no more."

CHAPTER XLII.

The Slaying of Love.

There were no complications caused by drink, no violent delirium to recur for days, and before many hours had elapsed Braetoun was about once more.

But to Olive's misery and despair there was some other great trouble or loss which kept her husband in a constant state of irritation, while his manner to her was agonising, and she lived in dread of some terrible scene, trembling the while as if she were guilty of some sin.

He was always receiving letters and telegrams, and various little things po nted to the fact that he was now approaching some crisis in his career. What it was more exactly she was soon to know.

It was one afternoon: Braetoun had come down very late after a sleepless night, looking irritable and strange, when the first letter he opened made him break out with a loud curse.

Olive sprang to her feet and hurried to his chair, to lay her hand upon his brow.

"Roderick, dear," she cried, "be calm."

"Calm!" he cried: "calm!"

"You are hot and feverish, and you frighten me. You will be ill again."

"Well," he said sneeringly, "isn't that what you want?"

"Roderick!"

"Another good fit of illness and insensibility, so that we may have the doctor again, and nice long nursing *tête-à-têtes*."

"Roderick!" she cried in agony; "how can you be so cruel? What is the matter?"

"Matter? What has always been the matter? You know well enough: money."

"Ah!" she sighed.

"Yes, money, beggarly money. Here am I, supposed to be a nobleman with a rich wife, and treated by everybody as if I were wealthy, and all the time worse off than a city clerk."

"Is it—another debt?" she faltered.

"Debt? It's a dozen; and money I must have from somewhere. I'm not going to be sold up, and so I tell them."

He leaped up, and went to a tall cabinet that stood between the windows, took out his keys, opened it, pulled out a drawer, and stood with his back to her, doing something which made a clicking sound, and then turned sharply round, holding a revolver in his hand, and thrusting some cartridges in his pocket.

"Roderick!" she cried, with a horrified look, and she sprang at him to try and take the weapon from his hand.

"Idiot! Don't be a fool, woman," he said harshly, as he wrested his hand away. "You'll have the thing go off. Oh, don't be alarmed. I'm not going to blow out your brains, nor my own either. This is for those cursed city hounds. Put in men in possession, will they? Law or no law, I'll shoot the first man who dares to show his face. A set of thieves! Two hundred pounds interest at least for every fifty I have had."

"Money—you have borrowed?" faltered Olive.

"That's it. Curse 'em, let 'em come; that's all."

"Oh, Roderick, you must not do anything rash."

"Oh, I won't, but I'm afraid they will if they come here," he cried, with a curious laugh. "The scum! It would be a benefit to humanity to polish off two or three of the scoundrels. Don't let them come in and interfere with me, that's all."

He thrust the revolver into his breast-pocket, and buttoned his coat over it. "But now, look here. I've been hard hit lately, after a pretty good run of luck, and I'm regularly in Queer Street. They are going to put in an execution——"

"What does that mean?" said Olive, trying to be firm.

"How sweet and innocent we are!" he cried mockingly. "Seizing and selling up the house and furniture, horses, carriages, and everything."

"Oh!" sighed Olive, as she thought of the household gods she had worshipped when she was a girl about to be married, so short a time back, but which seemed so long ago. Then, recovering herself: "Well, dear," she sighed, "let them take them and pay your debts. We shall be so much happier then."

"Oh, indeed! And you can go to your father, and use his carriage, and there will be nothing to mind. No, it isn't coming to that, my sweet wife," and he tapped his breast.

"Roderick, for pity's sake, don't talk to me in that cruel, mocking way."

"Very well, then, I'll put it straight I shall do someone a mischief if they use force, so you had better try and stop it."

"Yes, dear, I will," she cried. "There are all my jewels. I know they are worth a great deal. Let's take them and sell them."

"Pish! They'd sell for a song. No; you must go a different way to work. I'm not going to be disgraced like

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this. I haven't troubled the old man lately, and he hasn't troubled me. But he can't sit still and see you sold up. Go to him, and don't ask a favour of him; tell him he must help us, and then he will."

Olive's brow wrinkled, and she shook her head.

"I cannot," she said.

"But you must. This is no time for squeamishness. I let you off when you went to him at other times, and he refused—a miserable old miser!—but there must be no nonsense now. Tell him he must come down and save us from this disgrace."

"He will not, dear," cried Olive wildly. "It will only make him violently angry against you."

"What does that matter? He hates me as it is. He must and shall help us. Now then, go at once."

"I cannot, I cannot, dear."

"But you shall."

"I would if I could, Roderick; but it will only make matters worse. He said last time——"

Olive stopped short, and turned scarlet, then pale, and the tears rose to her eyes.

"Well, what did he say?"

She was silent, and shook her head.

"Tell me what he said," cried Braetoun savagely, and he caught her wrist.

"Don't, dear. You hurt me," she cried.

"And I'll hurt you more if you trifle with me. Now, then, what did he say?"

"Don't, pray, don't make me tell you, dear."

"Say it at once," cried Braetoun fiercely. "What was it?"

He was pressing her arm so cruelly that the pain awoke resentment, and she said quickly:

"That if you wanted money so badly you might sell——"

"The Brompton house," cried Braetoun, for she stopped with her face scarlet. "Yes, of course. Never mind; I'm not going to sell that, nor this either, so go and tell him he must."

"I cannot, Roderick."

"You go."

"No, I cannot," she said sadly.

"What? Out with it, then," he cried. "Say you will not at once."

"I will not——" She stopped short.

"What?"

"I will not insult my father by going and asking him again," said Olive firmly. "It is too painful and degrading. You cannot be so cruel as to force me to do such a thing as this."

Braetoun turned pale with rage and passion.

"Degrading, is it? Well, what if it is? Who are you to talk of degradation, after what has passed? Now, look here, I've put up with too much, and I won't suffer for nothing. Will you go to your father for help?"

"No, Roderick, I cannot," she said coldly. "You must go and ask him yourself."

"I would if I could get it," said Braetoun with a laugh. "Then you will not go?"

She made no answer, and there was a look in her eyes that he had not seen there before, one which reminded him of her father; but he was half mad with disappointment and rage at finding the timid, quiet girl no longer patient and plastic in his hands.

"Very well, then," he said, "it is no time to be nice; I must have the money from somebody. It's rather degrading for me," he laughed mockingly, "but the debts must be paid. Ring and order the carriage."

She rose, and crossed the room slowly to touch the bell, after which they both waited till it had been answered, and the door was once more closed.

"Now put on your things," he said, taking her by the wrist, and speaking through his teeth, with his eyes half closed; "drive to Wimpole Street, and tell Murray he must let me have five thousand pounds at once, or sign his name to bills for that amount."

Olive sprang to her feet, wrested her wrist away, and stood gazing at her husband with flashing eyes.

"Ah! that bites, does it?" he said, in a low husky voice. "I understand: don't reproach me again for being a little weak. He has plenty of money, makes no end, and saves it. Tell him it must be done directly, as I want it. Do you understand?"

"How dare you ask me to do such a thing as this?" she cried, with her cheeks flaming.

"Because he is the man who can refuse you nothing."

"Refuse me—nothing! Roderick, are you mad?"

"Pretty nearly, and I shall be quite if you don't go soon. Now, no nonsense—five thousand in cash or bills at once."

"But you cannot ask him."

"No, but you can."

"Why?" cried Olive excitedly.

"Because in this miserable extremity I am compelled to stoop and ask it of my wife's lover."

"*Roderick!*"

"Well, do you think I'm blind, that I haven't known what has been going on all this time?"

"This from my husband!" she moaned.

"This from your husband. Haven't I borne with it long enough—been obliged to bear with it—curse him! Do you think I did not know? Such a good, patient wife as you have been, nursing me through all my long illness. Such a faithful friend and clever doctor!" he went on in a low, fierce tone, completely beside himself with passion, but never once raising his voice. "Good wife! So admired by everyone for her devotion to her husband—and the doctor."

"Roderick, what are you saying?" she cried passionately.

"The truth," he cried savagely. "I've borne it all too long; now I'm forced by my misfortunes to speak. I am the culprit, of course—the fast man about town, and everyone has a kick at me, while you go on in your smug respectability, playing the model wife, and everyone is full of praise."

"Roderick, you do not know what you are saying? It is not true."

"Not true! When even the paid nurse has protested to me about my lady's goings on with the doctor, and I, poor helpless invalid, have seen her sneer as she spoke in a pitying way to me."

"Oh! That woman! Nurse Jennett?"

"Yes, that woman—Nurse Jennett."

"Roderick, my husband, don't, don't believe it," she cried.

"Even my mother warned me about what she felt sure was going on."

"Your mother! Oh, impossible!"

"Indeed! I was blind and foolish. I said you were too good and true a girl to deceive, and she said she hoped you were, but that it was my duty to keep my eyes open, for she believed that with all his smoothness Allan Murray was a dangerous man."

"I cannot believe it."

"Ask her, then. She said she had seen several little passages between you, which showed a gross familiarity."

"Roderick, I swear it is not true."

"Why, he owned to it—to me."

"Dr. Murray!"

"Yes; our dear Allan, the grave, quiet, thoughtful, clever physician, curse him! Told me he loved you, and always had loved you—told me to my face."

"Oh!" groaned Olive, and she sank back and covered her ghastly face.

"There," he cried, raising his voice; "deny it now. Tell me it is false, and then I won't believe you. But are you beginning to see why you are to go to him and tell him I must have this money? Are you too shamefaced to ask it of him now?"

"Oh, Roderick! That you could believe this!"

"You made me when I vowed that it was not possible. That nurse opened my eyes."

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Olive's hands dropped from her pallid features, and she looked Braetoun in the eyes unflinchingly, while his wavered and fell.

"Look at me, Roderick," she said in a low, pained voice—and her breath seemed to come short. "I am your wife—the woman you swore to love and protect."

"And I the man to whom you swore faith."

"Yes, and I have kept my oath, dear. Look me in the eyes and tell me you do not believe this cruel slander."

"I do believe it," he cried.

"Then all is over," she said, with a low, sobbing cry, "and I must go."

"Yes, and tell him there must be no shilly-shallying. I must have the money at once."

"I am going home, dear," she said wearily, "to one who will not believe this infamy of his child."

"What, run away?" cried Braetoun savagely. "Not you. You shall go and get this money off Murray."

"No," said Olive firmly, as she saw his hand go to his breast and half draw the pistol, "not if you kill me."

"It is of no use for you to fight against it. You have ceased to care for me long enough, but I'm not going to complain, and you are to blame for anything I have done. Just understand this: we must keep up appearances, I suppose, so get me the money, and I will take no further notice. I can't afford to have my health wrecked for the sake of a woman; and besides," he added, with a sneer, "the doctor is useful to me."

Olive stood before him with her hands clasped, gazing in horror.

"Oh," she cried at last, in a voice he did not know. "Is this my husband speaking?"

"Yes, your fooled and deluded husband. Don't trouble yourself to lie any more, but be content that I do not take some savage revenge on you both. We must have no more scenes, my money troubles are enough. I'm not going to be jealous, I tell you—you are not worth it. I ought to have known better, for it is what I might have expected from a woman of your birth and breeding."

"And this is my husband!" she cried at last, with a passionate outburst of grief—"the man who swore to love and protect me. Heaven help me, then—I must protect myself."

Her indignant womanhood thoroughly roused, she faced him, and for the moment he was cowed by the beautiful woman whom he seemed to know thoroughly now for the first time.

"Yes," she said, "it is true, then—that which my heart has whispered a hundred times. Lord Braetoun, the nobleman, my husband, is really a man utterly devoid of honour—oh, that I should have lived to say it—utterly cruel and base. Yes, I will go—not to Allan Murray, but to my father—not as your miserable mendicant, to beg for money, that you may waste it, but to seek refuge from your cruelty—and from this shame."

"What!" he roared, as he started up and advanced threateningly; "you dare to leave here or to do other than what I have said, and I'll kill you."

"Kill me?" she said with a bitter laugh: "my poor body. Why, you have already killed my love and girlish trust, made me a despairing, reckless woman, crushed out every hope. Well, kill me. Finish your cruel work I am ready. What have I to live for now?"

"Allan Murray!" he cried, but his eyes fell before her indignant gaze as he said the words. "Pish! Heroics! Stage. Once more, will you go?"

"I would sooner die."

"If you do not get it there is nothing left for me to do but blow out my brains."

She retorted with a contemptuous laugh:

"'Heroics! Stage!'"

He gazed at her now in wonder.

"You don't believe me?"

"No: you have proved to me by your words that you are too great a coward. Fresh from what was almost a school, what did I know of the world and its ways? I had no mother to whom I could fly for help and counsel, and, longing as I did for a woman's help in such a strait, I gladly clung to Lady Braetoun, and believed her praises of her noble son."

"Have you nearly done?" he sneered.

"Yes," she said coldly, but her words cut him as if they had been some weapon forcing a way to his heart. "I believed in her gross flattery, her blessings, and miserable adulation. She told me that her one hope, her one desire, was to see her noble boy happily married to some true, innocent girl who would give her heart's love—and—a hundred thousand pounds. True, noble, society mother, counsellor of the innocent girl. Oh, great Heaven! How easy it was! How soon I was snared! I listened—I drank it all in as the truth—her words—your words—and I believed. I did not love you, but I was attracted by all this, and I said it is the beginning of the love a woman should bear a man, the rest—the long clinging attachment of which I had read—would come. I became your wife in a dream, and ever since I would not awaken from it. 'The love will come,' I said. I prayed for it nightly on my knees, and I went on in my wretched dream, knowing all, seeing all, but refusing to believe till now that with cruel hands you have awakened me, and I cannot dream again."

"Have you quite done now?" he said sneeringly. "Then it is my turn. I am not too great a coward to use the pistol on myself—to make my exit, and leave him the charming young widow as soon as decency allows, and the fresh married settlements can be drawn out to satisfy your father."

She stood with her eyes withering him in their contempt, and he blazed out more fiercely now.

"Curse you! Confess it before I go. He was your lover before we were married?"

"I have degraded myself enough by my defence already," she said coldly.

"Once more—I give you another chance to save me—to save him. Will you go?"

"Yes. Home. Never to return."

"Then, by G—d! I'll go myself, and make him disgorge."

"Roderick!" she cried wildly, as he dashed towards the door; and she caught him by the arm, mad now with terror, but the struggle was short. He swung her here and there for a few moments, and then as he tore himself free, and rushed out, she tottered toward the door, which was flung back heavily in her face.

(To be continued.)

Result of Jumbled Story.

No. 16.

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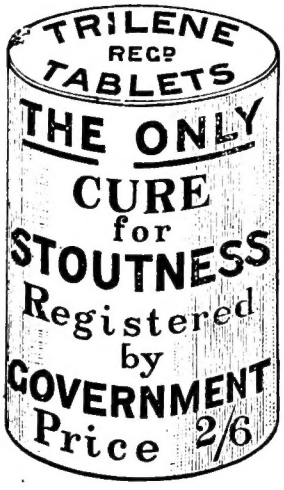

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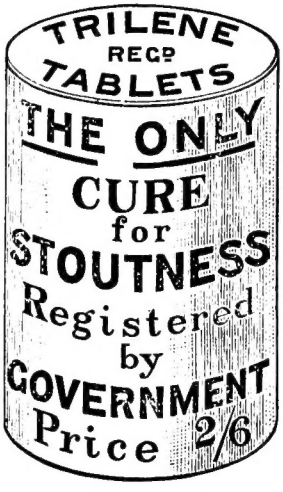

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